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INTERSECTIONALITY NARRATIVES IN THE CLASSROOM

"Outsider Teachers" and Teaching Others

Sara Makris

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To Daniel.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: "Outsider Teachers" and the Case for Intersectionality

Abstract Makris explains how studying the growing group of "outsider" educators can inform our understanding of the complexities of identity and its pedagogical implications. Race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, and social class can all contribute to the definition of "outsider teacher," but the roles these designators play are contextually dependent and fluid. In some instances, they even become "insider" characteristics. Traditional research into this area has focused on the effects of one of these compartmentalized identity qualifiers, creating an opportunity and a need for application of intersectionality theory—an accommodation of the complexity of interacting, shifting, and overlapping characteristics and the ways they morph according to circumstance. To highlight this opportunity, the term "outsider teacher" is further explained according to its connotation and historical use.

Keywords Intersectionality • Outsider teacher • Teacher identity

Many of us are familiar with certain representations of the "outsider teacher" in film and literature. Consider Sidney Poitier's portrayal of Mark Thackeray, a Guyanese engineer-turned-teacher in the 1967 film *To Sir, with Love*. In Thackeray's experience at a working-class school in the East End of London, class-related conflicts rise to the surface (though race hardly bears any mention). Thackeray is initially at odds with his students,

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ineffectually attempting to control the group of unruly adolescents on whom one teacher after another has given up. His frustration grows as he tries, unsuccessfully, to run a traditional classroom in which students inherently respect him and follow his rules. Eventually, Thackeray wins over the students and is invited back to the school to teach again the following year.

The archetype undergirds many similar media depictions of the outsider teacher: A white/black/middle-class/educated stranger from far away, unaware of the customs that govern a village/island/city neighborhood, enters the urban/rural/impoverished/chaotic classroom, and brings knowledge/intellectual curiosity/civilization to the needy/ignorant/coarse young people who dwell there. In films, television shows, and books, from *Dangerous Minds* to *Freedom Writers*, the outsider protagonist/savior delivers order and bestows meaning and purpose.

While these overly simple narratives trivialize the classroom experience, the concept of the "outsider teacher" is very real, albeit far more complex. Study of this growing group of educators can inform our understanding of the complexities of identity and our pedagogy.

The Outsider Teacher

Outsider teachers are those who possess identifying characteristics that differentiate them from their student populations. Race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, and social class all constitute potential areas of difference. Teachers may diverge from their students at the intersection of a number of these characteristics to be considered outsiders.

The term "outsider teacher," however, can mean different things in different circumstances. It may refer to teachers who come from a dominant culture—a predominantly white, middle-class population, for example—to teach students of color in low-income settings. "Outsider teacher" may refer to other border crossers: teachers who work internationally, leaving their home countries to teach elsewhere. Outsider teachers may include those who encounter marginalization regardless of their setting, for example, teachers of color, teachers with disabilities, and transgender, gay, or lesbian teachers.

For centuries, outsider teachers have facilitated the spread of languages, religions, worldviews, and political doctrine of dominant cultures. Some have been missionaries and "do-gooders."

In the late nineteenth century, British missionary teachers traveled to India, where they unsuccessfully attempted to instill Christian beliefs and British behaviors among "pure heathens" (Forbes, 2, 1986). White teachers

traveled from the post-war North of the USA to educate newly freed black southerners, and expressed disbelief when they encountered a population satisfied with its own pedagogy, expressing a desire to continue without their help (Anderson et al. 1998). Outsider teachers of the colonizing variety may, according to Lisa Delpit (2006), "hold on to their worldview with great tenacity, insisting that *all* of the others are wrong, peculiar, undeveloped, heathen, or uncivilized" (p. 74).

And now, greater mobility through globalization has enabled the migration of even more teachers throughout the world.

Similarly, individuals from marginalized groups are also now teaching in wider settings. Educators from low-income backgrounds teach children of the upper middle class. Teachers with disabilities overcome the institutional discrimination of colleges of education in order to enter the profession. A body of literature has begun to document experiences of these emerging groups of outsider teachers.

This book contributes to that collection as it describes the experiences of a group of outsider teachers, and it generates conclusions about their experiences that shed light on classroom interaction, communication, and pedagogical decision-making.

Outsider: A Troublesome Term

Before further exploration of outsider teachers and their experiences, it should be noted that the term "outsider" is not free of problematic baggage, bringing with it connotations of exclusion, judgment, and separation from the norm. It is used throughout this text with full awareness of its potential for negative implications.

The participants who joined me in this study had different reactions to the term "outsider." Three of the five participants embraced it from the outset. One participant initially rejected the term, finding it outright offensive. Through the course of our work together, though, she came to believe that it applied to her and fit her circumstances. She learned to embrace it as a strength. One of the participants ultimately chose not to be defined by the term, preferring to use "other" instead. She had worked her entire life to keep an outsider characteristic, in her case, blindness, from defining her. Her words to that effect appear in the chapter dedicated to her story.

The term "outsider" is certainly flawed, but it is compromised in the same way that almost any reductive label is. Similarly, it is useful in the way

that names and labels can be. It enables us to begin a conversation with shared language and develop understanding.

"Outsider" is clearly an oversimplification of identity, but addressing this oversimplification is another issue at the core of this study and something that using the term and studying the experiences of outsiders can help us understand. When we interact with a classroom full of students from a neighborhood—all from apparently similar backgrounds—we may think of them as sharing a collective identity. We can also easily allow ourselves to be characterized by a one-dimensional persona: white, black, gay, straight, disabled. This is not all that we are, but these characteristics contribute to defining us in our roles. And these characteristics—when they are distinct from the groups we teach—even if they don't reflect the entirety of ourselves, can still define us as others, outsiders from the communities we serve.

Ultimately, the role of the teacher is inherently one of an outsider—the only adult in a room full of young people, isolated among coworkers and peers in other fields. Teachers exist near a segment of the population with whom few other adults regularly sustain lengthy exchanges of ideas. Thus, this study—with its focus on teachers who feel defined in part by the qualities that render them outsiders—may have theoretical and practical implications affecting all teachers. Whether implicit or explicit, outsider status plays an inherent role in what it means to teach. Outsider teachers possess relevant wisdom to share.

The Importance of Studying Outsider Teachers

Studying the stories of outsider teachers and listening to their voices can help us develop an understanding of them as complex and unique individuals, and the ability to see people this way lends depth to our teaching. Just as we tend to see the outsider teacher in simplistic terms, so, too, do we see the classroom as a single entity instead of a collection of individuals. This is an area where the outsider teacher excels. And they have more to teach us. Toward that end, this book explores the following questions:

1. How do self-identified "outsider teachers" discuss the influence of this identity on their professional practice and interactions with students?
2. What characterizes the experience of "outsider teachers?"
3. How can the knowledge gained about "outsider teacher" identities inform pedagogy?

Here are some high-level answers:

1. The teachers who contributed to this book agree that their "outsider" or "other" status has influenced their work in the classroom to varying degrees, in a variety of ways.
2. The "outsider teacher" experience can be characterized in myriad ways, based on multifaceted identities and diverse settings.
3. The teachers profiled in this book demonstrate the following approaches to pedagogy: **practicing proactive inclusiveness**, **leveraging insider characteristics**, **relating through past experiences**, and **observing insider and outsider dynamics**.

These questions and their answers contribute to the growing research into the role identity plays in teaching, but it is hopefully just a beginning. More research needs to be done.

The more a group is studied; the more opportunity exists for individual stories and voices to emerge. These voices break through the categorizations and compartmentalization of the traditional academic research and provide true insight into the complex nature of identity, teaching, and being an outsider in a community.

The experiences of outsider teachers have received some attention in the scholarly literature, but often only according to isolated identity characteristics. In other words, researchers have looked at outsider teachers based upon individual categories; gay teachers, foreign teachers, black teachers in white schools, and transgender teachers have participated in research. Less commonly have teachers participated in research that examines their identity in its more complex forms: teachers, for example, who are outsiders along several lines and whose identities complicate their perception and experience in ways not accommodated in studies that compartmentalize their characteristics. Also lacking is a robust holistic study of the outsider teacher concept, something that could potentially enhance awareness of the subtler and complex roles of identity in classroom dynamics and potentially enrich the profession.

Throughout the scholarly writing in this area, studies have examined the factors that set one group or another of teachers apart from their student population. The studies often highlight critical issues, though their focus on specific attributes causes them to sometimes lack sufficient complexity when examining participant identity and its implications in a school setting. Much of the literature examines groups through a focus on individual

characteristics, for the purposes of defining research parameters. There are, for example, queer teachers (Blumenfeld 1994; McCarthy 2003; Sanlo 1999), disabled teachers (Anderson et al. 1998), ethnically diverse teachers (Flores 2003; Subedi 2008), and racially different teachers (Kelly 2007; Ladson-Billings 2009; Mabokela and Madsen 2003). What follows is a collection of some of the more commonly occurring themes.

Race and Class

In the literature that focuses on teachers who are outsiders in terms of race and class, researchers used observation and interview. They overwhelmingly wrote about their participants in isolation, after contact with their participants had ended. Researchers kept participants at a distance, and they tended to avoid lengthy interaction outside of the bounded observations and interviews. Researchers in most of the studies on race and class chose not to account for their own positionality. Researchers also, as mentioned earlier in this study, tended to focus solely on race in studies—fewer studies looking at race accounted for any other identity characteristics. Studies of white teachers tended to present findings showing a lack of willingness to engage in conversations on race with students as well as demonstration of negative attitudes toward students of color.

Teachers of color found that their colleagues tended to express racial stereotypes, and that they were often singled out to attend to "multicultural topics" as well as students of color. Jamie, one of the teachers I profile in this book, describes the expectation that he "work with" the African American students in the school when they had problems with discipline. Mabokela and Madsen (2003) found a similar occurrence among the African American teachers they studied who taught in white schools.

Gender and Sexual Orientation

Researcher positionality figured more prominently in the literature on teachers who were outsiders based on gender identity and sexual orientation. In several studies, researchers shared their positionality as members of the communities they were studying. One study in this category (Blumenfeld 1994) acknowledged the importance of race as a characteristic that could intersect with sexual orientation in an outsider teacher. Interviews form the foundation of this body of research, perhaps out of necessity, as many teachers in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community

might not wish to call attention to themselves as subjects of such a study. Indeed, Ferfolja (2009) notes the impulse among gay and lesbian educators to "manage" their "appearance, behaviour, and conversation" (p. 384). Among participants in research on the LGBT teacher community, many teachers expressed a sense of obligation to educate students about homophobia. A similar finding emerged among LGBT participants featured in this book. Jamie and Maria shared their commitments to encouraging open-mindedness among their students. Blumenfeld (1994) acknowledges this complexity when he discusses the withdrawal of lesbian teachers of color from participation in his work.

Ferfolja (2009) highlights the intra-group complication, in which experiences are varied among teachers who "pass" as heterosexual, and in which—although they are marginalized within the heterosexual world—gay men's gender affords them more power than lesbians. Blumenfeld (1994) also acknowledges the difficulty faced by members of multiple marginalized groups, in which one group rejects the existence of another. This is the only reference to this reality that I found in the education literature. Both Jamie and Maria, two of the gay teachers I worked with, note the homophobia they encounter at times from members of their race, and they discuss the conflict that this creates for them.

Nationality and Ethnicity

Many studies that focused on nationality and ethnicity included participant testimony to a minimal extent, though nearly all used interview. Researchers did not address positionality, and they came to conclusions independent of participants. Researchers focused on ethnicity alone, to the exclusion of other identity characteristics.

Race enters the frame when participants mention it, noting in one case that they had been unaware that they belonged to a racial category until they came to the USA. In some studies, participants described assumptions among US colleagues that they must be foreign language teachers. The studies intend, though, only to focus on the category of nationality, and researchers tend primarily to paraphrase participant testimony when it is used.

In contrast, Mirza (2013) notes a phenomenon among "transnational" Asian Muslim middle-class women, in which one research participant describes being made aware of her race not while in Canada, but when living in Britain. Mirza engages with the multilayered experiences of the

women as they move through the world—in a manner less prevalent within research on teacher identity. In this study, the findings demonstrated—to some extent—the "racing" of a teacher who was an outsider based on ethnicity. Kyong, another teacher participant, reported being grouped with other teachers of color in his school, and having gained a sense of obligation toward the students of color.

Ability

The studies that looked at teachers with disabilities focused little on active classroom teachers—they reported primarily on students in colleges of education, preparing for careers as teachers. It may be the case that a smaller pool of teachers with disabilities existed in comparison with the number of preservice teachers. In general, the limited amount of studies on teachers with disabilities is a reminder to curb attempts at too many generalizations from the findings.

Overall, the descriptions of the teachers in this area of research relied only somewhat on participant testimony. Researchers tended to summarize and paraphrase participant words, and their conclusions revolved around one main idea: Teachers with disabilities face significant obstacles both on the road to and within the classroom. This finding was contradicted in this study. Lisa, the blind teacher I worked with, described an environment in which she functions without impediment as an English teacher.

Blumenfeld (1994), writing in the Jennings text, acknowledges the empathy for the struggles faced by people of color and those with disabilities afforded to him through his experiences of discrimination as a gay man. This idea is echoed in Jamie's discussion of the difficulties experienced by special education teachers, as well as in Lisa's thoughts on the low expectations placed upon students diagnosed with learning disabilities.

Studies in which researchers openly identified as members of the participant group often included significant participant testimony in the form of direct quotes. When researchers did not identify themselves as members of the group studied, participant testimony figured less in the findings and analysis, with far less inclusion of direct quotes. Typically, one identity characteristic focuses a study, and others may be mentioned, often only tangentially, as in Subedi's study on teacher ethnicity, where the ethnicity of participants remained the focus of the study and race is mentioned to describe an aspect of the teachers' experience assimilating to life in the USA (Subedi 2008). Similarly, studies with multiple participants examined

a group with similar identity characteristics (Flores 2003; Mabokela and Madsen 2003; Whipple 2003). Among studies with heterogeneous groups of participants, researchers looked at one aspect of participant identities, for example, race (Ladson-Billings 2009; Obidah and Teel 2001) or ethnicity (Valenzuela 1999).

The studies also tended to express participant experience in terms of powerlessness. Particularly in the cases of marginalized outsider teachers, the analyses focus primarily on external events. The studies often show a simplified version of their existence, exempting participants and researchers from the possibility of transformation through the experience of engaging in the inquiry.

Extent of Inclusion in the Research

The extent to which the existing research looks at isolated groups varies, with some receiving more attention than others. White teachers of students of color, for example, receive considerably more attention than black teachers in white schools have received. Lesbian, gay, and transgender teachers have also participated in research on their experiences, but with less frequency than the teachers distinct from their students' race. Teachers who immigrate to the USA to teach in this country have been documented to an even lesser extent. And finally, the experiences of teachers with disabilities appear in the literature significantly less frequently than these groups.

Possibly because they are in the majority in some regions, white middle-class female teachers are among those who have participated in most studies. And perhaps because of the number of studies, a greater number of studies of this group exist that attempt to consider their complex identities and invite their participation in the construction of meaning. Researchers have looked at the ways that race, class, and gender define the experiences of this group, and researchers have also created space for these participants at the center of the research process, allowing participant voices into published studies. An inverse trend also occurs in the literature. Studies involving teachers with disabilities, for example, are rare, and as few as they are, these studies tend not to feature the participants as coconstructors of knowledge, sharing their own stories and experiences. Research on immigrant teachers, like that with teachers in the disabled community, has less often featured participant descriptions of events and participant-generated

analysis, tending to rely more heavily on researchers' interpretations and generalizations.

The one notable exception is the research of LGBT teachers. Perhaps because of cultural taboos, research on teachers from this community was scarce until the 1990s. The research that does exist, though, is often characterized by a significant focus on participant testimony.

Intersectionality and the Challenge of Compartmentalizing Identity

The complexity of interacting, shifting, and overlapping characteristics and the ways they morph according to circumstance—intersectionality—help us better understand the role of the outsider teacher in the classroom.

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), civil rights activist and prominent critical race scholar, coined the term "intersectionality," to describe the "double burden" faced by black women discriminated against in the auto industry. For much of the following decades, the term was used most widely within black feminist scholarship. In recent years, the use of "intersectionality" has expanded to define a multitude of oppressive structures—homophobia, ableism, sexism, racism, gender bias—that overlap to varying extents from one individual to the next.

Intersectionality theory creates a space for the ambiguity surrounding the concept of what it might mean to consider oneself an outsider. Understanding intersectionality helps accommodate the many shades between self-definition as an outsider and being defined as such by others or by society, as in the case of those whose race designates them as outsiders according to colorist perspectives—or belief in the superiority of lighter-skinned people (Hunter 2007)—as compared to those whose ethnic identity sets them apart but does not manifest in the form of an accent.

Intersectionality also acknowledges how identity categories interconnect to complicate and deepen one's outsider status. An individual's race may place him at a disadvantage in one setting; however, his gender identity will bestow status upon him in another. For example, a gay, white male's sexual orientation may render him an outsider, while his gender and race may grant him status.

My interest in this area stems from experiences as both an outsider and a teacher. As a young, middle-class, Greek American Jewish woman, I was a cultural, ethnic, and religious outsider during my tenure as a Baltimore City

School teacher. These identifiers gave me outsider status among my African American students, though my whiteness and native-sounding English still granted me myriad insider privileges. And my relative youth was an area in which I could sometimes relate to my students, though it occasionally set me apart from the other teachers. I was all of these things at once, though not all of them in every situation. My identity and status shifted. I also learned that sometimes these characteristics could be leveraged as assets and sometimes they were deficits I had to overcome.

An opportunity exists for research that offers a broader range of teacher participants the opportunity to share their experiences, to add their voices to the literature—not to have to select a single aspect of their identities.

This book responds to many promising beginnings in research on the experiences of marginalized individuals in the K-12 teacher population. It is conceived on the premise that outsider teachers hold perspectives, insights, and skills that can significantly contribute to theory, research, and teaching in an inclusive, pluralistic, and democratic society, but that much of the current study into this topic is hampered by narrowed scope that fails to accept the shifting and intertwined complexities of identity and environment. Studies of outsider teachers and intersectionality inform our understanding about whether and how cross-cultural teaching happens effectively from group to group, who qualifies as an outsider, and whether such a definition fits within the obvious boundaries of race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and ability, or whether our understanding of the nature of belonging and identity categories themselves warrant examination.

I should also acknowledge, that while it is my goal to present these outsider teachers in ways broader and more complete than just highlighting what makes them different, when I selected the participants for my own study, I, too, focused on the handful of characteristics that made them different from their students.

Through the process of my research for this book, interacting with them, and learning their stories, they naturally took on new dimensions. I learned to understand them as people, rather than components of their personalities, to think in terms of multifaceted, interacting identity characteristics, and the portrayal of individuals through a limiting characterization of their identities seemed to be lacking a degree of substance. Different facets take precedence, depending on the situation, but one can never simply stop being all the things that one is. This is the value of understanding intersectionality.

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CHAPTER 2

The Role of Narrative

Abstract Makris illustrates the value of narrative inquiry in applying intersectionality theory to the study of outsider teachers. An overview of narrative inquiry principles is followed by an explanation of the role this research methodology has in this study. The author introduces herself as a research participant and recounts through a series of personal narratives how she has been recognized herself as an outsider, how she was introduced to the concept in an academic setting, and how she has experienced classroom teaching as an outsider.

Keywords Qualitative research • Narrative inquiry • Personal narrative • Teacher narrative

Since nearly the beginning of our existence, human beings have used stories to teach and explain. From drawings on the walls of caves, to religious texts passed down for generations, stories have taught us about our histories, our communities, and ourselves. Yet, the role of narrative and storytelling in academic research is still in limited use. Increasingly, however, researchers are starting to accept that, as it has for centuries, narrative helps us arrive at truth and understanding.

Scholars D. Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (2000) have described narrative inquiry as a methodology "in its infancy," that underscores "a view

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of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (p. 477). According to the researchers, "Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as a story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience" (p. 477).

Narratives can enter research through the stories told by participants. By bringing participant testimony and experience to light, researchers Anderson, Keller, and Karp (1998), and Jennings (1994), renowned academics Ladson-Billings (2009), Lareau (2003), and Valenzuela (1999), among many others, generated research that includes not only meaningful portraits of teachers but also functions as a viable source of ideas about classroom practice. Obidah and Teel (2001), along with McCarthy (2003), allowed the voices of participants to guide them to their research findings. Marx (2008) gathered her data by surveying the students as well as members of the administration. She found that the teachers who had experienced struggles in their lives were best able to "relate to their students in some valuable ways" (p. 59). Subedi (2008) found a similar experience among immigrant teachers, as did Flores (2003) with Filipina teachers in US schools, Duquette (2000) with disabled teachers, and Jennings with lesbian and gay teachers.

The narrative inquiry approach forms the basis for the methodology used in this study. The use of this approach allowed me to represent my own "storied life," as well as those of the participants, through personal narrative and portraits of participants. The portraits make use of participant stories told in their own words, organized around the stories of our conversations. All featured participant names are pseudonyms.

The research for this book required that participants involve themselves for an ongoing period to encourage reflection and sustained interaction. I included myself in the group of research subjects for several reasons. By keeping track of the elements of my experience that brought me to this place, I hoped to keep my motivations and my thinking clear. I didn't want to ask people to share anything or do work that I would not also be comfortable subjecting myself to. I wanted to partner with my participants in a sincere effort to gain insight. Rather than placing myself at a distance to conduct research *on* others, I conducted research *with* the participants in the interest of learning together. As a means of clarifying the context in which my autoethnographic vignettes occur, here is a basic chronology of my life:

I was born in Athens, Greece, in 1977, to a Greek father and a Jewish American mother. My parents had met and married in New York and had returned to Greece following the collapse of the military junta in 1974. We

stayed in Greece until I was two and a half years old. I was bilingual at this time. In 1979, we moved to the USA, where my mother had relatives and my father hoped to find work. On our arrival in the USA, I stopped speaking Greek, eventually completely forgetting the language. Six years later, we returned to Greece. I began fourth grade in an international school, in a city whose language I had forgotten. I graduated from that school in 1994 and traveled back to New York to attend college.

In this chapter, I include three personal narratives to provide some grounding in my experiences as an outsider and an outsider teacher in a Baltimore public school. The first narrative describes an experience of outsider status among high school friends. The second narrative tells of an outsider experience I recall as a new graduate student. The third, and final, narrative describes my experience of outsider status as I began my teaching career in Baltimore, along with some of the ways this status served me as a new teacher.

Childhood Experience as an Outsider

In the fall of my eleventh-grade year, I was fifteen. I was visiting my friend Suha's house for the first time, with another friend, Melina. Suha unlocked the front door and we entered the apartment.

On the wall above the living room sofa hung a Palestinian flag.

"Suha! You're home?" A tiny woman appeared in the doorway, "Come out, come and eat something. Suha, introduce your friends." She looked us over and began speaking in Arabic, a language we heard often, intermingled with Greek and English at our school. The sounds of the language were familiar, and even though I didn't understand her words, her meaning was clear as she shooed us into the kitchen.

"Okay, mom, we'll wash our hands," said Suha.

"I don't want bacteria in the house!"

"Yes, mom. Mom, this is Melina and Sara."

"Hello girls."

"Nice to meet you," we both mumbled.

"Mom, we're gonna go to my room."

"Okay, Suha, but. . ." and they began a rapid exchange in Arabic. Suha motioned for us to move down the hall without her. We flopped down on Suha's soft twin bed, followed soon by Suha, who then closed the door. "Want some?" She threw a roll of vanilla sandwich cookies at Melina, who began working an end loose.

"Your mom is nice," said Melina. Looking back on this moment later, I always noted how well Melina presented herself around adults, especially people's parents.

"She's cool," said Suha. "Let's go outside, so we can talk."

"Where?" I asked.

"We'll go to the park across the street. I'm just gonna tell my mom." She leaned out the door. "Mama! We're going for a walk!" Suha looks over her shoulder at us. "She's watching The Young and the Restless now. Nothing will distract her. Let's go."

Outside the apartment building, we crossed the street into a small park filled with pine trees. On a secluded bench under a low hanging limb, Melina asked Suha, "So where's your family from?"

"Palestine," said Suha. I remembered my father once telling me that Palestinians were people without a country.

"Where's that?" asked Melina, inquisitive and open as always.

"Right next to Israel," said Suha with a scowl. With hardly a pause, she continued. "I hate Jews."

"Why?" asks Melina. I listened, rapt, for Suha's response. My stomach churned and I focused on the dust and gravel at our feet.

When my family had returned to Greece, we had left behind a largely Jewish enclave in New York. I went from celebration—through parties and temple services among a tight knit circle of families—to total silence where this part of me was concerned. Since resettling in Greece, we had met only one Jewish family. Judaism was virtually nonexistent in this country, as, already a minority, ninety-eight percent of the Jews in Greece had been wiped out during the German occupation of World War II.

"Jews are disgusting," said Suha. I stayed quiet.

"You can't say that. That's prejudiced," said Melina with amazing ease. For years after, I note how easily those words seemed to come for her. I never developed that same ease, and I later noted that my lack of response was echoed by my parents in similar situations.

Throughout my childhood in Greece, I heard "Jewish" used pejoratively on many occasions, even among family friends seated around a dinner table. Judging from my family's cautious lack of response, it seemed as if being Jewish were better left hidden, so I quickly learned to conceal this part of myself.

As a young person facing hostility toward a fundamental part of my identity, I experienced the conflict of feeling hated for who I was while simultaneously concealing that aspect of myself, even among many people I otherwise felt close to. Based on this insight, I instinctively developed an

approach toward teaching in which I assumed that any group of students possessed characteristics that might not be immediately visible. Though I lacked the language of proactive inclusiveness, I tended to model an inclusive attitude, staying away from exclusionary language, assumptions, or classroom norms. My ability to relate through past experiences gave me a sense of how others might feel when relegated to outsider status, affording me some connection with certain students I encountered.

In the following vignette, I tell a story of my experience entering academia. In this story, my professor's proactive inclusiveness reminded me of an earlier experience of outsiderness. Within the context of my first doctoral-level class, I began to understand the possibilities offered by self-reflection and analysis of one's own life.

The story of the class, and its accompanying remembrance, laid the foundation for this book. It marked the beginning of a new stage of identity formation for me, and caused me to embark on a deeper acquaintanceship with myself. In this early experience, I had no sense that the process had already begun.

Student Narrative

I arrived late to the first class of my PhD program—a seminar.

In the small, carpeted, windowless room, I took an open seat near the door, looking down. The professor had already begun her introductory discussion, and I pulled a notebook out of my bag as quietly as I could. Noticing a touch of gray in the professor's hair, I regretted my late arrival even more, embarrassed at the thought of showing a lack of respect toward an elder. I remembered my father always nudging me to give up my seat on the bus when anyone older climbed aboard. Focusing on her words, I decided to somehow redeem myself through a show of intense concentration and attentiveness.

The professor reeled me in with her lecture, as she painted a picture of the varied experiences of young people growing up in different areas—urban and poor, wealthy and privileged. She mentioned that one of the advantages affluent children have is in their experiences with travel. They learn so much during the trips that their families take. This is privilege, she explained. She qualified the generalization of "travel," though. Letting us know that we should not confuse the experiences of children of military families who travel with those of wealthy children traveling for leisure and experience, she noted the isolated existence associated with life on a military base, describing the

xenophobic tension that could develop among US military personnel and natives of the countries that they inhabit. I felt suddenly at home in this room.

I thought back to my eighth-grade home economics class. Two American army bases still existed in Greece at that time, an active presence for decades, before the socialist government's mid-90s rule removed them permanently. I sat with my Greek friend, Alexandra, near two American girls. Pale skinned and slight, their light yellow hair cut in an outdated feathered style, they wore black jersey stirrup pants and pastel sweatshirts. One sneered at me and asked, "Where did you get that pen? It looks like the kind they only sell at the commissary," spat the tiny blond girl, "and you can only go there if you're allowed on base."

"Base" meant the American military installation in a northern suburb of Athens. The base brought active duty military personnel to Greece, many of whom sent their children to our school, where most of the instruction occurred in English, though many of the students were Greek.

The military children stuck together and tended—I thought—to disparage Greece. They seemed repulsed by the food and the people, stubbornly nationalistic. In those years, I began to develop an image of what "American" meant: blond-haired, blue-eyed, and English-only. Somehow, once I had relearned my Greek and had fallen in with my group of school friends—many of whom were also Greek—my view of myself as an American—born in Greece to an American mother—grew foggy.

These girls did not consider me a compatriot, certainly not friend material. I did not consider myself one of them either. Nor did I associate myself with the American tourists who roamed Athens yelling slow English at shopkeepers. I looked at Alexandra, whose dismissive glance makes me chuckle.

"What is she talking about?" I asked in Greek.

"How should I know?" she answered, also in Greek. We shut them out with the language they refused to learn. Their insinuation, that I had crossed a line into their space and had taken something they were entitled to, seemed absurd, accusatory, and insulting. I knew then that it was silly, yet the feeling of being mistrusted and excluded stayed with me.

Sitting between Alexandra, a through-and-through Greek girl, and these two girls who used the term "American" as praise and "Greek" as a pejorative, I belonged and simultaneously did not. I was an American, too, but somehow, not their kind of American. When surrounded by Greek friends like Alexandra, with no full-blooded Americans to dissociate myself from, I felt less and less of anything. I sometimes bluffed my way through conversations,

knowing all the words but faking recognition of Greek idioms and commonplace religious references.

A year after that incident, the US invaded the Persian Gulf. Bomb scares at my school would become a monthly, sometimes weekly occurrence. During that period, as anti-American sentiment increased, with a local Marxist guerilla organization assassinating US dignitaries and bombing "imperialist" targets, family members and I refrained from speaking English in public. Speaking only Greek enabled me to avoid identification, and my large eyes and dark hair helped me to pass as a non-American. Many years later, within minutes of my late arrival to the graduate seminar class, the professor—through an extended reach that encompassed even my peculiar-seeming background—summoned these memories that had lain dormant for years. And now, after not having thought of this period in over a decade, as I recalled these experiences they took on new context and significance. I was connecting to an early outsider experience. The lecture hadn't been about me or my experiences, but the conversation was inclusive, it felt big enough for everything and everyone. We were all included.

I share this story here to juxtapose the experience of being an outsider with the feeling of acceptance that comes from inclusion. The memory of the confrontation described in the story highlights experiences with the feeling of being left out, but the framing narrative shows the welcoming environment that can develop when a teacher anticipates difference among her students and strives to accept and accommodate it. I was the beneficiary of my professor's proactive inclusiveness.

In this next narrative, I recount an experience from my first-year teaching in the Baltimore City Public Schools. It was a foreign environment to me, but I recognized some of the personal struggles individual students were having, and I practiced managing the group dynamic created by a dominant insider group. It was a formative experience, and I still had a lot to learn about teaching.

Teacher Narrative

I hardly slept at all during my first week as a teacher.

The world of Baltimore public schools was no place I recognized—everything felt different, the buildings, textures, culture, behaviors, norms, uniforms, people. Even the swampy climate was strange. Students were always being told to stand in a line, to be quiet, even in middle school. No gym class, no art, no recess, no breaks, ever. Students trudged up and down worn steps in the

stairwells. From the hallways, I could hear teachers yelling at their students behind closed classroom doors. My own classroom felt huge and empty. I recognized almost nothing in this new world.

The class I had directly before lunch included some of my most challenging students. They seemed to descend on the room with a cacophony of paper rustling, chairs being dragged across the floor, too-loud talking, and nonstop laughing. They were not my favorite group—I was far past the point of admitting that to myself, and it was only the first week. They did not seem excited about English class, and the group seemed to contain an impossibly wide range of personalities, from the painfully shy to the overtly outspoken. They all had in common their obliviousness to me. I looked around the room and wondered what to do, how to pull them in and engage them. As I stood back and watched, saying nothing, individuals slowly emerged from the crowd.

One girl sat quietly, eyeing the small classroom library. I whispered to her, under the din of the group, that she could choose any book she wanted and start reading. Her face lit up and she crouched down by the bookshelf. Nearby, a group of boys, clearly old friends who had probably been through many grades together before middle school, sat together, leaned their chairs back, and lazily goofed off. One of them had no bag, no materials at all. His uniform shirt already looked worn, even this early in the school year. As I stood next to the group, telling them to lower their chairs to the floor and get out their notebooks, I discreetly passed him a pen and some blank sheets of paper. No words exchanged, we made brief eye contact, and he nodded as I moved on.

Though I was only just getting to know these kids, their community, and this school, I had been an outsider plenty of times before. Without thinking much about it, I began to rely on my observational instincts and my own memories of not speaking the language, not knowing the unwritten rules, being different in some undesirable, unwelcome way. While I may have always had a pen and a notebook, I had arrived to class before without the cultural cues and context I needed, and I recalled with appreciation the times a teacher or peer had supplied them. I could see who might be feeling excluded and find a way to quietly let that student know she was important and valued. I saw who was missing supplies and provided the tools that student needed. By addressing these issues on the side, I could get everyone to the starting line, and we could move forward together. I might also win some allies.

As I roamed the classroom, checking in quietly, reminding kids to get pencils, paper, and books out, students started to notice that class was beginning, and settled down a bit. Some backed me up: "C'mon! She's trying to

teach! Go ahead, Miss Makris." Almost everyone seemed ready to go, except for one small group.

A rookie mistake, I had let a clique of makeup-wearing, freshly coiffed girls sit at a table together, right in the center of the room where they could carry on with ease. They glanced at me, talking back and forth about how young I looked, pretending to whisper, but knowing I could hear. This happened a lot in those early years, and I let it slide. Though I was new to teaching, I was not new to people, and I had a feeling that I might want to pick my battles.

I noticed a face in the clique I did not recognize. Great. This student had missed the first few days of school, and here she sat. "This is Ayanna, Miss Makris." Ayanna turned to me, pursed her lips, and asked, "So, you supposed to be the teacher?" A colossal pause while the room hushed, waiting. I mentally groped.

"Why?" I asked, with a suspicious sideways glance. "Who sent you?" Another beat, and a smirk wiggled across Ayanna's face. The whole class laughed then, and I felt some tension drain away as I began introducing our lesson for the day.

Though I would lose countless battles in those early years, many of my risks would fail to deliver, and I would spend countless days feeling around for footholds and lifelines, this small gamble had paid off, and incidents like this gave me hope.

I had observed the power dynamics of the "insiders" in my classroom, which had given me an instinctive grasp of my need to win over Ayanna in the interest of gaining attention and respect in the larger group. I had also recalled past experiences of not wanting attention for the wrong reasons as an outsider, and these memories had signaled a need to reach out quietly to the shy girl who wanted something to read and to approach and assist—and not chastise—the boy without supplies.

In these initial years of teaching, I believe that my outsider experiences benefitted my classroom practice, as they gave me insights I might otherwise have lacked. Though it would be well over a decade before I began researching outsider teacher stories, and longer still before I intentionally deployed their approaches in my classroom, the seeds of my own outsider teacher approach were just beginning to take root.

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CHAPTER 3

Teacher Narrative: Jamie

Abstract Jamie, a gay African American from an urban, low-income background, teaches in a predominantly white, Jewish, suburban New England town. He describes feelings of outsiderness including how he becomes the "go to" token person of color in his school or how his students will interact with him in the way they see African Americans are depicted interacting in pop culture. Jamie is able to leverage his gender and education for status, but is constantly aware of his outsiderness. He describes methods and techniques for navigating his classroom and environment.

Keywords Sexual orientation • Race • Class • Religion

I'm the only black teacher in the school, and while that doesn't come up often—like it doesn't come up in conversation, it's not something we talk about or I talk about—kids will notice it.

Jamie has been teaching for the past nine years. His first three years of teaching took him to an urban high school in the South, though now he teaches English at a public high school in an affluent, primarily Jewish, suburban area in New England. Although the school's website boasts a highly diverse community, the area's population is over 90% white. Income levels are above the US average, and most children reside in a household with two married parents. Over 1100 students attend this school.

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Jamie is an African American man in his mid-30s, an English teacher with a Ph.D. in education. He is gay and grew up in a low-income household. All of these factors—like his long dreadlocks—set him apart from the community in which he has taught for the past six years.

When Jamie was in the sixth grade, a teacher told him that his writing was better than that of most of her high school students. She suggested that they collaborate on a children's book that he would author. Although Jamie never did write the book, the characterization of being strong in English stayed with him. He knew that he wanted some sort of career in the field. After majoring in English in college, he gained admittance to a prestigious graduate program in education, something he never thought he would accomplish. The relative importance of the subject itself—"in high school, you had to take four years of it"—emphasized for him the importance of the skill set associated with it.

Jamie has a love for his content area. "Reading is how we get smart and get into other people's experiences," he tells his students, giving a sense of the social justice orientation that guides his pedagogy. Jamie's teaching philosophy seems guided by two themes that surface again and again as he discusses his work. First, we can learn about others and ourselves through the study of literature, and second, inequity is a fact in the world, and reading and discussion can help us to better understand this in order to address it in our lives. Jamie emphasizes the importance of self-discovery among adolescents in the high school classroom, as well as students' need to form personal connections to the content they are studying. Jamie adds, "It's an important thing for people to be able to speak right, and communicate clearly and effectively." Jamie surmised that if he could help others to accomplish these things, he could "improve their lives in some way." This was the logic that led him to teaching.

Secondary education appealed to Jamie because he "didn't want to be the person responsible for teaching them the building blocks, but kind of wanted to polish them." Jamie finds that many of the students in his current school are primarily motivated by grades and their impact on grade point averages. He feels, and has the sense that his colleagues also feel that "they miss the point of education as we teachers want it. We want them, of course, to love learning, to learn with a love of learning, and it seems like the kids in this setting are really just concerned with performance."

Jamie's approach with the students in his current suburban school is quite different from his approach toward his students in the urban district. Motivated by a keen sense of societal inequality, Jamie felt he had to prepare

his urban, low-income students of color by motivating them to face the rigors of an unfair world. He describes his earlier teacher-self as being "just in their face telling them, 'This is what the world thinks about you and this is the stereotype, and what are you going to do to break that?'" He has adapted those earlier methods to his current school—one in which his students tend to focus more on keeping their GPAs high than combating societal bigotry. He says, "I did try to come with the same social justice kind of equal representation theme, but it seemed like it was far removed from those kids. Not all of them, but it's far removed from their experience."

Students in this affluent school describe staying up until 2 am to complete homework assignments. Parents feel comfortable questioning teachers about their pedagogical decisions. I asked Jamie why he thought parents felt so comfortable questioning teachers, and he replied, "The kids didn't get to where they were alone. I think that children are very much molded and shaped at home, and I think that the parents in the community are very interested in their kids doing well academically and they're very, very interested in their children going off to excellent colleges."

In his first school, Jamie felt that the "external pressures that superseded school" prevented students and their parents from focusing too much on grades. He describes, also in that community, a "vast respect and admiration for teachers as role models." This brought about great pride in the work he did there.

To bridge the gap between his experience and that of his current students, Jamie now uses literature. He describes the process this way:

> What I try to do is make as many connections between their lives and what's going on in the subjects we study and the books we study and help them to realize that the reason that literature is so important, the reason that reading is so important, is because it helps you empathize, helps you sympathize, helps you connect with people on such a deeper level than you would be able to in your own experience. It kind of extends your experience. But that's a concept that is very tough, I find, for them to grasp. So I think I spend a lot of my time working on sympathy, empathy, perspective, point of view, which is very difficult to get across to them.

Jamie leverages his students' focus on grades and excelling in school to encourage them to interact with different people and perspectives than they might normally encounter.

During his first year of teaching, Jamie had a transgender student in his class. Initially, even he mistook the boy for a female student—and this caused much nervousness when he considered how classmates might react. Anxious and feeling unprepared for the responsibility of making this student feel welcome in the classroom, Jamie wondered how to manage the behavior of the other students. The experience defined his teaching style for the years to come.

Jamie developed a proactive approach to fostering the inclusiveness that he carried within him among every group of students he teaches. At the start of each school year, he emphasizes the importance of creating space in his classroom for all voices to be heard—for students to respect one another and to keep this in mind whenever they share opinions. Rather than waiting for tricky situations to arise and deciding at that point how to react, Jamie builds this message into his pedagogy:

> I made sure to let students know that words with a history of hate like "nigger" and "faggot" would not be tolerated. I stressed the importance of respecting our differences and accepting each other as individuals. I made sure to call on that student as much as other students if not more so, because I know how important inclusion is to the outsider. At the same time, I avoided addressing him as a spokesperson for gays or transgenders—a mistake other outsiders and I often notice being made by the mainstream culture in an effort to include our perspectives.

Using his influence among students, Jamie models the respect he wants his students to show to those who are different from them. He plainly communicates his expectations and demonstrates patterns of acceptable interactions. As the authority figure and teacher in the classroom, Jamie is using his role to teach proactive inclusiveness.

His approach seems to be working. "Everybody loves Jamie," says a mutual friend, after describing a dinner at which Jamie once quickly charmed a law school dean into a handshake admission. He currently has no plans to attend law school, but when I met him, I saw the charm. Someone who speaks easily and looks for common ground and connections with others, Jamie welcomed me to such an extent that we hugged goodbye after our first meeting. His wide smile and mischievous sense of humor belie a powerful intellect.

When he speaks, Jamie's voice tends to linger in a low register, and he lets out a throaty chuckle from time to time, punctuating one clause or another. The calm pacing of his speech keeps a listener's attention. He speaks in sentences.

Of his colleagues, Jamie says that he has "a very collegial and congenial working relationship with them, but I wouldn't say that they were my friends." He describes relationships that are highly satisfying professionally, but which do not extend beyond school walls. Teachers in his school supported him when he arrived, a fairly new teacher in a somewhat foreign environment. Similarly, the administration, he says, has been "supportive towards me in allowing me to be who I want to be in the classroom and then allowing me to have the materials I need to be successful."

Jamie received more professional support at his current school than he did at his original urban school in the South. This is, in part, he says, because the pressures of student achievement on standardized tests kept all teachers especially focused on their own classrooms out of fear of poor evaluations or loss of their jobs. "I kind of felt like I was just thrown in the rat race and everyone else was in the rat race too, and so no one could get off their wheel long enough to help me."

At the suburban school, where there is a less hectic environment, Jamie has noticed that his colleagues tend to call upon him to counsel male students of color when they exhibit negative behaviors. This ability to leverage his insider characteristics to make connections with students may result from his outsider status, but he does find it curious that his white colleagues seem to assume a connection will naturally exist between two black males. Jamie says that this is not necessarily offensive in and of itself, but that "other aspects of my experience have made [such an obvious connection] not a reality for me." His sexuality and the personal history of introversion he exhibited until adulthood have made him feel like an outsider among many other black males.

Jamie describes this feeling going back to a "less social" childhood and adolescence in which he developed a sense of separation from others who shared his race but not his sexual orientation. His most effective connections with students have tended to be his ability to understand and relate to others, sharing the difficulty of growing up with gender and sexuality, like the transgender student. While growing up Jamie felt some distance from other black males, he still recognizes that it is one of the many aspects that makes up his identity. As he explains:

> . . .now that I'm older and I'm in this position, it's worth it for me to think about how kids [of color] will look at me and how other teachers in the building look at me and what they think I can do. And I generally tell them that I can do whatever they think I can do. But then (laughs) I think about it

> and I'm like "should I have said that I can really get this result [with a student of color]?" Because I don't know if it's necessarily true (laughs).

As Jamie reflects more deeply on his conflicted feelings about being selected by white teachers to approach male students of color, he reconsiders even further:

> I think it's understandable, because I think that we do need strong male role models for kids and there aren't as many of them. And there's definitely not as many strong male role models of color. So, I think you do bear a certain responsibility when that is you.

Jamie has accepted his role as what researchers Mabokela and Madsen (2003) call the "resident expert," a phenomenon common among African American teachers of white students (p. 99). It is not just the teachers reaching out to him, though. Jamie finds that students of color also seek him out. Students of color confide in him when teachers have confused their identities, calling them by each other's names in class, or when they have felt as if they were "called on to be the representative of their race or ethnicity" by white teachers. He realizes that his presence is especially important to the students during times like these, as he is the one faculty member who can truly relate to such an experience.

The ability to relate to his students of color is often in stark contrast to experiences he has had with white students. Jamie's white students remark often that he resembles "various long-haired sports figures or entertainment icons" because he is African American and wears his hair in dreadlocks. He encounters frequent stereotyping behavior from these students.

His youth and his friendly demeanor compensate for many of the differences between him and his students, but he faces other challenges because of those same characteristics:

> One interesting challenge I face working in a suburban environment is that students will often refer to me in terms they have seen applied to young blacks in the mainstream media. Young men especially will respond to me, saying "Yo," or asking "What up?" or by trying to give me an intricate handshake or to "dap me up." Because I am the only black teacher in my school, whenever this happens, I think to myself, "This would not be happening with any other teacher."

With patience, Jamie challenges these stereotypes. His calm, sunny personality keeps things light, and he employs a forgiving approach to these "teachable moments," explaining to his students why such behaviors do not constitute appropriate interaction with teachers. He concedes:

> A lot of these types of behaviors aren't intended to be racist or disrespectful, but they are often the product of ignorance. One thing I can say for certain is that if a kid does not know any black people, he or she will probably form an interpretation of blacks from the mainstream media, and that interpretation will only capture a very limited view of black culture and customs.

Jamie appreciates that while his students are sometimes making awkward and uncomfortable assumptions in their interactions with him, it is not with mal intent. In fact, he finds that his students' perceptions and opinions converge in a surprising area—they think that racism is a thing of the past.

He describes an assigned curriculum that acknowledges racism and inequality as themes in the literature that must be addressed. He says, "I find a lot of these kids—and I don't just mean white kids, because I noticed this actually with kids of color, too—they think that issues of racism and segregation and inequity and inequality amongst people, that these are past issues. That they don't really affect the world anymore." He describes studying works like *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *A Raisin in the Sun*. "we're reading this stuff and they're like 'You know, but that was then. That would never happen today.'"

At moments like these, Jamie faces the challenge of correcting misperceptions, even among those of his students who are bused in daily in order to attend a better school than those in the areas where they live. Jamie sees it as more than just his responsibility as a teacher to broaden their understanding:

> I think being an educator and being a black man, I guess I could even bring in being homosexual too, and just in all the ways that you are other, you realize how [inequality] still does work in society today and you want to get that message across to the kids. You know, "I can't let you get out of this class and go to college and go out into the world and say that there's no such thing as privilege and everybody's equal now. That would just be irresponsible."

Jamie finds that his colleagues have also noticed a similar trend in their classrooms in terms of student perceptions of contemporary racism, but he has the sense that he may tend to focus on it more than they do. He

contends that this may be a function of their privilege. "I have never talked to any teachers [here] who have been a product of poverty or a low socioeconomic standing." His outsider status may even fuel a sense of urgency in his efforts to challenge his students' thinking about social issues.

Jamie's race and sexuality are not the only elements of his identity that influence his interactions with students and colleagues. Jamie's youth allows him to relate to students with relevant cultural references as well. He incorporates references to popular culture and current trends into his teaching whenever possible. This helps the students connect to him and trust him.

His level of education, and the associated title, Doctor, command a measure of respect. "My students are the only people who call me that," he says, although Jamie also has a sense that his possession of a Ph.D. degree garners the admiration of his colleagues as well. Jamie concedes that being male has also contributed to greater acceptance, respect, and insider status among members of the school community than he might have enjoyed otherwise. As he explains, "Schools definitely value male teachers, and they probably do what they can to retain them, because there's such an overwhelmingly female presence in a school setting."

As he reflects on the other factors that counter his outsiderness with insider privileges, he brings up his Christianity. This, he acknowledges, is complicated. His student population's largely Jewish identity has, on the one hand, been a differentiating element. He has had to become an "overnight expert" on customs, particularly those that inhibit his ability to assign homework before certain holidays. On the other hand, he acknowledges that a degree of privilege comes with his membership in the most dominant religion in the country.

He describes, in his Southern school, "using biblical terms and assuming the kids would know what I was talking about, and being successful up until now." When he tried using his religion to relate to students in the predominantly Jewish school, he encountered confusion; for example, in response to references to the New Testament, his students would ask, "Is that a new custom? Because we don't know anything about that." This was no longer an effective method for using shared experiences to build a bridge between the teacher and students. As a Christian in a predominantly Jewish environment, Jamie experiences both the roles of insider and outsider.

In his community of teachers, Jamie considers himself an insider by virtue of his role as a "regular educator," that is, a teacher who is not assigned to work primarily with students designated as needing special education

services. He describes his responsibilities in the classroom as being far less demanding when compared with the work of special education teachers, who must advocate for their students more frequently:

> I struggle with not making these considerations an after-thought. Prior to recent advances in teaching, teachers generally taught to the kids who "got it" at the expense of others. My training tells me otherwise, but it does not undo all my years of experience as a student and my tendency to emulate the teaching styles of my various teachers and professors throughout my long educational career. I find that the more I cater to multiple learning styles and learning differences, the more comprehensive I feel my lessons are. This causes me to take a step back and think about who I'm teaching and how I'm teaching—but this has been a process I have had the luxury to think about less than my special education colleagues. Getting to know these teachers has made me acutely aware of my insider status as a regular education teacher.

Despite acknowledging his insider status and leveraging his outsider status to aid in his teaching, Jamie nonetheless finds himself set apart from his students, faculty, and school community by race, class, education, and sexual orientation. He is ever-aware of this status.

His students seem to be the most willing to acknowledge this: "when I first started there was a girl who was a senior who walked up to me who had been in that school setting for her entire public education career, and she told me that I was the only black teacher that she had ever seen throughout that entire time."

"I know that, as an outsider, you feel left out unless you are explicitly included," says Jamie, describing the way it feels to be gay in a largely homophobic world—one where he still cannot legally marry his partner in many regions, thereby missing out on the financial and social benefits accorded to heterosexual married couples. He discusses his feelings about what it means to be a gay teacher:

> In this case, I feel that most people react in one of two ways: either to deny their "otherness" and sync up with the mainstream (possibly with self-denial or homophobia) or become militant and oppositional to the mainstream. I grapple with how to present that part of myself to my students, and generally I do not [share it]. I attempt to remain neutral, but I often wonder if that neutrality hinders my gay students in finding a voice for their status as an "other" and coming into full acceptance of themselves.

Jamie feels that his experience as an outsider informs his teaching. Not only does he strive to create a "safe space" for discussion in his classroom, but his study of literature with his students is underscored by a focus on embracing the perspectives of others—even those whose experiences are hard to imagine because of their differences from one's own. Jamie recalls spending most of his free time indoors "with the adults" throughout much of his youth. He always loved reading and had always wanted to teach. He considers himself an observer of people, and traces this tendency back to a childhood surrounded by adult conversation, listening in for some tidbit he was not supposed to hear. Jamie feels that his observational nature has served him well as a researcher.

Taking his observant, attentive personality to his classroom, Jamie does his best to engage students and to make the most of a context in which he stands out dramatically. He finds purpose in connecting his students to literature, helping them to define themselves through writing, and challenging them to reframe their perspectives on the world, just as they have taught him to do.

Reference

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CHAPTER 4

Teacher Narrative: Maria

Abstract Makris introduces "Maria," a teacher in a low-income urban environment. While Maria grew up in the community where she now teaches, her sexuality and gender identity set her apart from the community and her students. She describes the difficulties of working in an, at times, hostile environment but also explains areas where she has honed skills and leveraged her status, ultimately becoming a valued member of the faculty and community.

Keywords Gender identity • Sexual orientation • Class

I think "outsider" is a good term. I feel like an outsider, because I can't really be myself. And maybe it's because I'm uncomfortable within myself, I don't know. But I just can't be myself. That I do know.

Maria has been teaching for four years, though this is her first year at the school where she currently works. She teaches middle school social studies at a public elementary-middle school in a major city on the East Coast. The school of about 400 students has 98% African Americans, the majority of whom are eligible for free lunch. Although Maria spent some of her childhood in this neighborhood, she moved away and returned to teach there just one year ago. Maria is also African American and comes from a similar low-income background. She finds herself set apart from her community;

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however, she is a lesbian with "masculine" gender identity, apparent both in her baggy clothing and in her athletic build.

Her inspiration to teach began with one of her own teachers, a successful lawyer and law professor, who had become a classroom teacher after retiring from that earlier career. Maria describes her as a "role model, as somebody who can go along and have this career, and yet still can give back at the same time."

The notion of giving back followed Maria through college, resurfacing during her senior year, when, although she had been planning to attend law school, she thought again and again of teaching, ultimately deciding that it was the career she wanted to pursue.

Her first teaching job was at the same Catholic high school she had attended, in which teachers were required to adhere to a "morality standard" to "uphold the Catholic faith," an environment that highlighted her outsider status. Rather than openly admit her sexuality in the Catholic school, she instead learned that she needed to be discrete about showing these parts of her identity. She left the Catholic school, pursued a master's degree, and then returned to teaching in the position that she now holds.

Teaching in the Catholic school, however, wasn't Maria's first introduction to her status as an outsider, and nor has it been her last. She describes how, even within her immediate family, her sexuality has set her apart:

> I have been ostracized by my relatives, primarily my mother, aunts, uncles, and older cousins. When much speculation about my sexual orientation began in my late teens I would often come under attack and scrutiny. When I was between 16 and 17, an aunt kept questioning me over and over about who or what I was. I remember and still to this day can feel the anger boil from within me from her line of questioning. I kept thinking and said to her at one point, "Why does it matter?" and "Why are you, at your age, concerned with what a 16-year-old is or isn't doing?" I had an uncle who would comfort me and tell me he didn't see me any differently but I would think to myself, "If I'm no different, why do you have to tell me that?" My mother above all reminds me constantly of how much I am not wanted. She tells me that I'm perverse, sinful, a disgrace, and that I will one day bust hell wide open. Out of three girls, I am the only one who is gay.

Being ostracized and condemned for being gay was, unfortunately, not an experience relegated to childhood, but an effect she experiences still as an adult and in her teaching career. One fall evening after school this year, for example, Maria had stayed behind to catch up on some grading. She ran

into a student's uncle in the main office—someone with whom she had spoken many times—and in passing, let him know that his niece was in danger of failing. She left the office, and soon after, a student caught up with her to relay a hurtful story. On hearing that his niece was failing her class, the uncle had called the student's mother and had passed on the information, calling Maria "that dyke." The hateful words stung and led to a much larger incident. Maria writes of the following moments:

> I was so shocked and offended at what I had heard and I immediately [found and] confronted the uncle about what he had said. I made it clear to him that I didn't care necessarily what he thought of me but that he needed to keep his "assumptions" about me out of the ear shot of a child. Before I knew it, me and that uncle [were] shouting outside of the school at one another. He kept insisting that I was a "dyke" because of the clothes I wore and how I carried myself. I will admit, I had some words for him that were a lot more damaging than what he said to me, but throughout the entire ordeal, I just felt so hurt.

Maria describes how she "walked away from that experience feeling a variety of emotions." In addition to her outrage, she describes how she had actually been trying deliberately to keep her dress feminine to avoid scrutiny. Following the incident with the uncle, she writes, "I felt like I didn't play my role well, and that if he could sense I was gay then surely others could as well." She feared that her attire might cause others to think she looked too much "like a man," and she began to isolate herself from other adults in the building, feeling that she "wasn't adequate enough."

In the wake of the incident, administrators asked Maria to write up her version of the events. They ordered the uncle to stay away from the school during the school day. There was no additional follow-up.

Maria says, "I honestly just don't think they knew how to go about approaching the situation. You know, actually [. . .] I didn't really know how to go about approaching the situation."

The confrontation itself was an ugly culmination of the types of smaller interactions that Maria faces regularly: interrogations from colleagues about her romantic life—colleagues who are assuming she is straight, her own habit of second-guessing her behaviors, wondering whether she is sending a "signal" about who she really is through some careless gesture or omission. She rejects the burden of having to decide whether to "come out," and she wishes to "avoid being the go-to person for answers about what it means to be gay."

Fortunately, in the second semester of the school year, Maria connected with several colleagues who self-identify as lesbian. They still speak in gender-neutral "code" about dates and significant others when they find themselves among straight coworkers, but they are colleagues with whom Maria can openly share these aspects of her personal life without fear of judgment or other consequences. The difficult environment is softened somewhat by the presence of allies, though she remains guarded, private, and vigilant.

In addition to the personal attacks and questions about her sexuality, the school where Maria works presents a generally difficult professional environment for many of the teachers. There is widespread discord among faculty members, whom she describes as sharply divided along racial lines. Among what once was a primarily African American teaching staff, white teachers "who are young, inexperienced, and Teach for America" have been replacing veterans whom many felt were "being pushed out." Maria describes black faculty members who see this shift as an expression of racism rather than pedagogical interest.

Maria empathizes with the African American teachers, but also finds that their low morale is difficult to deal with. "It brings down the work that they do inside the class." Because many of the teachers feel targeted by an administration that has seemed determined to hire from outside the community, Maria senses that they have given up. And she has found that students and their families are picking up on the mood.

She understands the mood of the older African American teachers, while at the same time she recognizes the difficulties faced by the younger white teachers at her school. She knows that many are in their first or second year of teaching, and they have never dealt with such a toxic community. They have also never dealt with kids of a different color and with behavioral issues. As she explained:

> They're trying to combat their own stereotypes and then to have so much animosity by some of the other staff. . . . I feel like it's kind of a raw deal, especially if you don't have a background to what [this city] is about, you're stepping into a lion's den. I feel bad for them. I honestly do.

She has watched African American parents confront white teachers, accusing them of not knowing the community or the children well enough to teach in the school. Because the administration has been experiencing its own internal division and infighting, much of the discord has gone

unaddressed. In this chaotic environment, Maria describes taking on any job within the building she deems necessary. In her free periods, she walks the hallways. She describes her role this way:

> I am the unofficial administrator at the school. I shake kids down. (laughter) I do. I am a security guard. I guard the doors. Any discipline concern or any issue that's happening, I go in and remove students, talk to parents. . . . I'm the one that has to keep order and discipline with kids. So when a child is being physically aggressive, when there's a fight or something, being the one to go in and remove them from the classroom, remove them from a fight, remove them from another student who they're trying to choke out.

Maria's personality and demeanor lend themselves well to the role of authority figure. A life of defensiveness has made her tough. She usually appears stern and solemn, very serious, and I admit I felt intimidated by her at first. Our first interview even began with some tension, me afraid to make some misstep. I asked her to remind me of her subject area, which I thought was English. "I teach Social Studies," came the swift reply. "Don't disrespect me like that." It was an unexpected joke, one that let me in on her secret—that her sternness is a contrivance, albeit one built out of necessity.

As we talked, I understood that the environment at her troubled school would challenge even the most experienced of teachers—in fact, as she observed, it has. And overall, her impression of the school's administration is negative. Despite her efforts to keep order beyond her own classroom walls, and to pitch in and offer suggestions to the principal and vice principal, the feeling of being targeted has haunted her. Overtly attacked by the uncle of one student, she has also felt the subtle judgment of some faculty members from whom she has concealed her identity. She feels that administrators have second-guessed her and overlooked her contributions. Maria found herself crying in her car almost every day of the fall semester. It is a brutal environment, and one in which her outsider status often makes her feel even less part of the community she is from and trying to help. Maria's experience has not been easy.

When I first met Maria several years prior to her involvement in this research, I was leading a cross-cultural simulation with a coinstructor in my graduate program. The colleague and I corralled 30 graduate students into two classrooms and gave them a series of complex instructions on how to adapt to two made-up "cultures" into which we divided the group. This is an exercise that attempts to give insight into the experience of being part of a simulated majority as well as having temporary minority status.

For every group of students who feel their eyes have been opened by this exercise, however, there are several for whom it is a pale representation of their actual existence. That day, Maria was assigned to my group, and as the students in the group practiced their new culture—one that included close physical proximity with much talk, laughter, and physical contact—I noticed that her behavior was different from that of the other students. She skirted the margins of the larger pack, observing, hanging back, circling the main event and studying it. Maria is, out of self-protection, reserved and a keen observer of people.

As I have gotten to know her more, I have found that the observation accompanies understanding, empathy, and a deadpan sense of humor—used as an acknowledgment of her protective shell—all characteristics that students can appreciate. She is also remarkably forthcoming with her students about her personal life, leveraging significant insider characteristics:

> I try as best as possible to make students aware of who I am and where I come from. I tell students about my upbringing, about my mother's alcohol and crack addiction and the absence of my father. I inform students of how I was once homeless at the age of 16, forced to take care of myself and become savvy on the streets. I also let students know that many of my mannerisms and dress comes from being on the streets so much. I think in doing this I have been able to reach students who would at first glance assume that I'm some prissy, uppity chick who doesn't understand their world or the obstacles they face.

This honesty helps her connect to the students in ways that many teachers cannot. The environment that the students come from is unlike anything that many teachers ever encounter. Describing her school, she says:

> My school is very urban, very street, very poor, very depressed. A lot of emotional instability. A lot of violence, especially in the neighborhood. We are the lowest [performing] school in the metro area. We're like the shame; the shame of the city. It's a school with high needs. We're in a crack-infested area. If you want your drugs, if you want a whore, you just go across the street to the quarters and get it. If you want a gun, you want to see some type of violence, you want to see some type of death, just go across the street. And our school looks out onto that neighborhood.

Although Maria spent part of her childhood in that neighborhood, when she returned to it to teach, she felt a need to reassimilate. She had far more insider awareness of the area than some other faculty members; she also

possessed skills that would enable her understand the context behind community issues confronting her students. She cites careful listening, learning the history behind individuals and happenings, and remaining cautious about accepting things at face value as important life skills for that environment.

"I'm not a perfect teacher," says Maria. "I'm not the best teacher. But I feel like I have great rapport with students. I've never had discipline or behavior problems." She describes the investment she has made in earning the respect and trust of her students:

> I just think it's my relatability, I want to say, with students, and the fact that they understand where I'm coming from and I understand where they're coming from. And it takes a while in order to build or establish that, inviting them inside my world just a little bit. I mean, I try to obviously make sure there's a clear boundary between adult and child and my privacy and what I choose to share.

But she shares information that she knows will make an impact with her students. "I let them know right off the bat, 'Hey, my mother's a crack [addict]. You know, my mother's an alcoholic.' These are the things that I've had to overcome." Maria is careful not to make assumptions about others, but she does not feel that she receives the same treatment from her colleagues. She feels judged and held at arm's length by her colleagues and an active effort "just always having to throw people off so that I don't become a topic of their discussion."

This phenomenon is echoed in McCarthy's (2003) study on one transgendered teacher's experience in a mainstream public high school, as she notes that the teacher developed close relationships with her students, even as she struggled with revealing fundamental parts of herself to the school community. The teacher describes a situation in which her female students feel comfortable approaching her to ask for advice, and—perhaps because of her nontraditional gender identification—male students approach her just as easily. She believes that this happens because the male students see her as occupying a neutral space, gender-wise. So that when they are asking for romantic advice, they are not exactly asking their female teacher, but someone outside the confines of binary gender identification, someone, perhaps, whose opinions will not be motivated by convention and someone who will understand the need for confidence.

Maria, too, has developed close relationships with many students. Students tend to seek her out:

> They come to me even when I don't want them to. (laughs) They come to me, they sit down and they talk and they tell me about things that are happening, what's going on, what they're going to be doing, things that are troubling them if they need help with something. And sometimes they just come to sit, just to get away from a lot of things.

Maria conceals her sexuality in the workplace, opting out of the difficult and potentially dangerous consequences of being "out." This struggle has made her especially attuned to the ways in which adults try to instill gender-specific behaviors in children. This is an example of accessing her memories to inform her pedagogical expression. While she is not open about her own sexuality, she does consider it her role to undo some of the damage to students caused by reinforced messages about gender-appropriate behavior and the value judgments placed on conformity to societal standards. She regularly challenges students when she finds them judging and mistreating another based upon rigid adherence to these societal norms. This is an area where many teachers may fear to tread, either because they fear the consequences they might face or because they do not know what to say. Maria, however, recognizes the potential damage caused by allowing these behaviors to go unchecked. She describes a typical interaction in her classroom:

> When I hear students say "Oh, that's gay," I just ask them, "Why is that gay?" "Because he's singing a Beyoncé song." "Is singing a Beyoncé song gay?" "Yeah, that's gay." "But do you know Beyoncé songs?" "Yeah." "What song do you know? Yeah, how does it go?" And they start singing it. "And does that make you gay that you're singing a Beyoncé song?" "No." And so it's simple things like that that I try to do with students.

This relatively common classroom exchange between students demonstrates deeply held and damaging beliefs about appropriate actions for members of each gender group. It illustrates the common conflation of sexual orientation with gender identity and the societal equation of homosexuality with transgression or incorrectness. "That's gay," functions as a catchall derogatory phrase for many adolescents, and few teachers consider taking on its implications, let alone opening a dialog with young people to unpack its deeper layers of meaning. Maria sees the value of teachers

interrupting verbal transactions like this one, if only to demonstrate the importance of choosing one's words and considering their implications.

In her experience of life as an outsider, Maria has faced the consequences of this type of language and belief going unchecked. Ignorance about her identity has manifested itself in painful confrontations and humiliations. These experiences have enriched Maria's sense of the responsibility of what it means to be a teacher in the service of her students.

Having lived at the mercy of others' assumptions, she knows the feeling of being pre-judged. Having experienced the angry end of callowness, she knows its destructive power. Maria describes the way these lessons articulate themselves in her thoughts about teaching. She practices proactive inclusiveness as she attempts to appreciate and understand her students. As she explains:

> It is important to not make assumptions and to really take the time to go find out about students. Or taking the time to just listen to what students are saying and try to understand a little bit more about what's going on before automatically jumping down a student's throat about something or before automatically speaking on something. I'm finding that a lot of teachers speak up on issues that they know nothing about. I just want to be able to speak up on things that I'm knowledgeable about and take the time to listen before I make any assumptions.

Her proactive inclusiveness translates into empathy for her students. "Because I recognize that my sexuality is something that's not looked upon in a positive light in my community, I make sure that I take extra steps to try to stop [it] when I see students being picked on or harassed for certain things." She also speaks of stepping in when she hears faculty members using derogatory language that students might overhear. Adversity has also brought patience and generosity of spirit. As she describes:

> My students recognize that I'm genuine in my intent and that's allowed me to form connections with them that I didn't think were possible. Students trust me enough to come and talk to me about anything and everything that's going on in their world, and they know that I'll never betray their trust. In many ways, I believe that my sexuality contributes to how well I'm able to form relationships with my students. I know how it feels to be judged, to not have someone to speak to and be honest with. When I sit down with a student, I see myself and I give to that student what I would have wanted someone else to give to me.

Maria's outsider identity extends throughout her school and beyond. This is an outsiderness she found imposed on her from an early age. Her sexual orientation and gender identity differentiated her. Even into adulthood, Maria found her outsider status imposed on her by others. She has used skills learned from life as an outsider to better understand the struggles faced by her students, and she believes that it has helped to make her teaching more effective.

Reference

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CHAPTER 5

Teacher Narrative: Lisa

Abstract A blind teacher of sighted students in the Midwest, Lisa has spent much of her life defying stereotypes and proving her capabilities. She rejects the term "outsider teacher," as she has made significant efforts to integrate into her community. Her classroom practice demonstrates proactive inclusiveness and is informed by her own experiences learning to adapt to an environment that was not designed for her. She draws on her experiences of struggle to overcome obstacles to engage and encourage students. Lisa makes a compelling argument for intersectionality.

Keywords Disability • Inclusiveness

The reality is that my blindness is only one characteristic comprising my identity. It does make me different in terms of sight ability, but it doesn't define how I feel. When I go to work, I think of myself as a teacher, a thoughtful person, a professional. I don't think about blindness.

Lisa teaches language arts to ninth graders at a public middle school of about 1200 students in a suburb outside a large Midwestern city. One of the more affluent suburbs in its area, its population is over 94% white. Most children are raised in a household by two parents, and family incomes run well over twice the national average.

Lisa, also a Midwesterner, is a white woman in her early 30s. Her gender identification tends toward traditionally female dress and behavior. She has

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been teaching middle school English for 12 years. The primary factor that sets her apart from her students is her blindness.

Two stories had to unfold before Lisa's teacher narrative could become a possibility. The first story is that of Louis Braille. Born in a French village, the teenaged Braille injured himself with an awl he was using to puncture a piece of leather. The awl struck one eye, causing instantaneous blindness, and an ensuing infection soon spread to the other. Completely blind, Braille began to adapt to his changed life. His parents sent him to Paris where he entered a school for the blind, and there he had access to a handful of books for the visually impaired. These were printed using rudimentary, tactile types that existed at the time.

Puncturing a piece of hide with the same awl that had brought about his blindness, Braille devised a simpler, easily replicable writing system. His system enabled reading using one finger instead of both hands. More compact, it could generate books that would fit in one's pocket, in contrast to the large tomes of raised lettering he had found at school. Individuals could also write by embossing a page with Braille characters, whereas the systems of tactile printing used involved techniques and specialized machines. Still widely used, Braille enables Lisa to write. She can take personal notes, make lists, and create worksheets whose contents she can read aloud or otherwise share with students.

The second story is the story of Ray Kurzweil. A lifelong inventor, Kurzweil possesses internationally recognized talent in the field of abstract pattern recognition. Kurzweil saw the potential of this computer application to enable machines to recognize multiple typeface fonts. A chance plane flight sitting next to a blind gentleman convinced Ray that the most exciting application of this new technology would be to create a machine that could read printed and typed documents out loud, thereby overcoming a reading handicap of blind and visually impaired individuals—not all printed material is available in Braille ("Ray Kurzweil Biography—Academy of Achievement" 2017).

Kurzweil began work on his first "reading machine" in 1974, and his company made it available to the public in 1976. Over the following decades, Kurzweil's company continued the development of readers, developing the Kurzweil 1000, computer software that turns electronic and scanned text into speech. This means that Lisa can read any text she come across—any e-mails, newspaper, website, or book that she can access. She can assess student work, whether submitted electronically or in hard copy,

which is then scanned into PDF form. The text-to-speech technology gives Lisa full access to transactions involving the written word in all its forms.

The technologies and tools created by Braille and Kurzweil are indispensable to Lisa's daily tasks, particularly in that they address the logistical concerns associated with being a teacher at work in a mainstream public classroom. Having accommodated the need for written communication and organization, Lisa can focus on bigger questions.

For Lisa, portraying herself as a part of her Midwestern public high school—part of the faculty, part of a district-wide curriculum development team, and part of a community—proved a worthier endeavor in our work together than simply analyzing the ways in which her ability status makes her different from her colleagues and students. She took issue with the terminology of the study:

> The word "outsider" implies that you're not inside. It almost seems to me to be more of a physical separation somehow, to say that you're an outsider. It just makes me think of someone standing on the sidelines and watching everything happen rather than making things happen. So I think that's why I don't like the term.

Lisa describes a faculty and administration in which collaboration and collegiality define most interactions. She seems to appreciate her colleagues, though she describes herself as a "pretty strong introvert," preferring more intimate socializing to gatherings involving large groups.

Lisa cites her most vulnerable moments as those in which she must ask for help in order to do her job. Because she is an independent person, "and maybe sometimes to a fault," this is rare. On certain occasions, "where literally I cannot do anything else," for example, when she must find a student in a crowded cafeteria or auditorium, she asks a sighted coworker for assistance. She admits to requesting a handout for a meeting in advance, so that she could "Braille it" in order to arrive prepared. Lisa considers her independence an "asset," though, "because I take care of what I need to," she says. "I'm not waiting for anybody else to make adaptations or to figure things out. I'm the one that's taking care of it."

Lisa cites her curriculum development work with colleagues from across the district as one of the few consistent sources of conflict she encounters in her work. She describes the situation this way:

> When I think about what I bring to the committee, part of my identity as a teacher is a very strong belief that kids need to be able to connect to what they're reading and what they're writing and that it has to be really useful to them.

She finds that many other language arts teachers in the area favor a more traditional approach to teaching in their subject area. Her views of effective and interesting teaching, based on a model of self-directed learning and student-centered lessons, sometimes meet with less than positive reactions. Her pedagogical commitments seem to stem from the inspiration she found in certain classrooms of her adolescence. Just as with the teachers she can recall who awakened her thinking about learning, she says, "philosophically, one of the things I bring [. . .] is just a very strong belief in that the content has to be meaningful for kids and they have to be able to connect with it."

The people Lisa connects with best at her school include the other English teachers she works with most often and colleagues who are also members of her teaching team. This is, in part, because of her introverted personality. While Lisa's introverted personality may contrast on the surface with her chosen profession, she describes it as a strength in her ability to form connections with students who have the most difficulty adapting to the school environment. She exhibits the trait of relating through past experiences found in other participants. In her own words:

> I probably connect best with students that struggle with something. That are either really anxious kiddos, so they're dealing with anxiety, or maybe socially they don't fit in very well. That's where the strongest connections are. [. . .] I think having dealt with something that makes me different from most people, I guess there's more of a natural comfort there with students who might be dealing with something that's similar.

She draws from her own experiences and challenges regularly when working with students, and there is urgency in her tone when she speaks of the necessity of imbuing lessons with meaning that extends beyond the classroom. The importance of making meaning through her teaching may have evolved from both her love of English and her need to put her own education to the test to achieve her goals. Here, Lisa describes the perspective that her identity has given her.

> I think that when you navigate the world with a difference, with the characteristics that would make you different from the majority of people, you do have a type of insight that I don't know that others do. By others, I mean the majority. So you as an "other" would have more of an insight than the majority of people who aren't others. But I think that if you have a difference and you see how people with differences can be treated and you see how expectations change, I think you have a different type of understanding.

She practices proactive inclusiveness to set expectations of acceptance and appreciation of diversity. At the beginning of each school year, after introducing herself to students, Lisa shares a list of queries for students to answer. She calls these "Loaded Questions." The prompts include the following. What is one talent you have that you wish others recognized more? Describe a time you judged someone before you knew them. What is one challenge you have had to overcome in your life? Describe the one person you would do anything for. Through their answers, the students tell their own stories about rejecting face-value interpretations of people. In addition to helping establish her classroom as one where everyone has faced adversity and has a depth and identity, these questions also offer an opportunity for a teacher to know her students beyond simply observing their ability to behave according to public school norms.

Just as Lisa challenges her students with this survey at the beginning of every year, she entered this study armed with challenging and informed questions. Her response upon being invited was to question everything: my motives, my use of terminology, and the purpose of the study. She interrogated the use of the term "outsider" as well as my intentions:

> The reason that I'm not comfortable with it is because my blindness, it does make me different from the majority of people in the building. And so when we're talking about the characteristics of the different types of, to use your word, "outsider" identities that people can have, whether it's gender or race or accent or whatever, I mean that is a characteristic that somehow makes someone different, and so because of that characteristic, they do bring another perspective. And maybe that's how I can sort of like the word a little bit better, because I'm kind of thinking of it in terms of I have an "other" perspective that I'm bringing, I have an "other" . . . you know, "other" techniques that I'm bringing to the situation.

She had a point, and I was surprised when she agreed to participate in the study anyway. I think it was so that she could share her "other" perspective with me. She is thoughtful and intentional like this.

When we talk, Lisa speaks with clarity and eloquence. I began to get used to the long pauses over our telephonic conversation, to allow her time to think without rushing to fill the silence with my own commentary, though even when I did rush to speak, I had the sense that she waited for me to finish and then continued with an explanation of her thoughtful response to my question. Sometimes, Lisa lingers on a single word, repeating it as if patiently summoning a thought that lay just beneath the surface.

Lisa has always wanted to teach. She credits her own teachers, especially those who "really made a difference in how I thought about the world around me," as primary influences. The teachers who inspired her most gave "the feeling of really learning something, something that would extend beyond the classroom." Describing her goals as a teacher, she says:

> I really wanted to be able to be that type of catalyst in thinking for other people. I [wanted] to be the type of person who could present a perspective or angle that students might not think of on their own. [...] I think about awakening other perspectives, taking the way that we look at things, and using that power to see people differently. [...] I absolutely fell in love with language and how it presents to us so many windows and mirrors [on society], and I wanted to help other people experience those windows and mirrors.

She knew early on that she wanted to be a teacher and pursued that goal, and she is both studied and sincere about her pedagogy.

When we talked, she encouraged me to expand my thinking beyond a focus on difference. Lisa emphasized the need to create space for challenges to the pedagogical status quo that could be brought about by the inclusion of teachers with blindness in mainstream classrooms. In our first interview, Lisa recommended that I read *Moving Violations*, journalist John Hockenberry's (1995) memoir about adjusting to and living his life as a paraplegic, following an injury in a car accident. My reading of this piece formed a backdrop to my conversations with Lisa, illustrating some aspects of what living with a disability can feel like. In the memoir, Hockenberry tells the story of encountering a favorite professor in the restroom at the University of Oregon. The philosophy professor exclaims, in the moment, that he had never thought of Hockenberry having to use a bathroom, commenting,

"Isn't that interesting?" (p. 119). This story comes after Hockenberry tells of a break-in at his apartment.

Hockenberry had surmised that the burglar must have studied his movements and habits for several days, because the break-in occurred with precision. The burglar had known exactly where the most valuable items in the apartment were, and had even known to remove the ramp outside the front door, leaving Hockenberry stranded, unable to exit in his wheelchair. Hockenberry describes a feeling of perverse appreciation that the burglar had taken him seriously enough as a human being to learn how to gain the upper hand and get away without being caught.

He looks at this in comparison with the professor, who seems to see him as a curiosity—an odd creature whose existence momentarily piques his interest—and certainly not as a serious student, in spite of Hockenberry's extensive efforts to prove his capabilities as a university student.

Considering the professor's comment in the wake of this recent event, Hockenberry writes:

> If [the professor] didn't think of me as a biological creature, what did he think, that I went to the hardware store instead of the bathroom? What did anybody think? What did they learn from staring? As much as I hated being robbed while I sat helpless in the next room, at least the burglar had been paying attention to the right details. (p. 119)

The complex feelings expressed by Hockenberry suggest something to me about Lisa's tone and entire approach to her participation in the study. She consistently steers the conversation in the direction of pedagogy, perhaps lest I focus too hard on her blindness and allow that to become the only story. She writes, "I've come to like the term 'outsider' less and less. Its implications don't accurately reflect my experiences. The term 'other' might be closer, though I struggle with that as well." Lisa's issue with my terminology is a reminder of the need for intersectionality in our study of outsider teachers. She's right that I reached out to her because she is blind, and she wanted to be seen and represented as more than that.

In his memoir, Hockenberry also shares an occasional feeling of going through life "like a footnote." He gives the impression that his existence is extraneous in the eyes of many paternalistic able-bodied people he encounters—that his survival itself is surprising, and that anything else he might accomplish in addition to simply being is a pleasant surprise. People frequently ask—or assume—if he has considered suicide, an idea he finds

preposterous. Hockenberry encounters shockingly low expectations, as one story during his participation in a training program for people with disabilities entering the workforce illustrates.

After expressing a well-articulated statement of interest in attending college and having a career in communications, he is promptly handed a bowl containing a jumble of nuts and bolts. He is instructed to sort carefully through it to separate the nuts from the bolts. He wonders what occupation this will prepare him for, and he feels dejected at having his ambitions ignored because of his wheelchair.

The feelings portrayed by Hockenberry parallel Lisa's objection to the "outsider" designation. In terms of feeling "like a footnote," Lisa's objection centers on an interpretation of the term as a connotation of powerlessness. She seems proud to discuss her work on a hiring committee for new teachers in her department, as well as her service in district-wide curriculum planning. These positions indicate status in the teaching profession. Not only has Lisa received recognition as a successful teacher; she has also achieved special designation to collaborate in decision-making beyond her own classroom.

Such assignments are a way that public school teachers can begin to feel a degree of autonomy. Lisa's description of the "outsider" designation as an isolating one parallels the notion of isolation—and sometimes infantilization—faced by classroom teachers, as well.

To many teachers, service beyond the classroom can show that they have earned the trust of their leadership. One's teaching has been deemed exemplary to the point that other teachers might benefit from it.

Just as Hockenberry opens up his story to all readers, taking time to educate the ignorant, Lisa turns her annual introduction to each new group of language arts students into an opportunity to educate, to initiate, and to include. As she explains:

> Discussing blindness with my students is my way of sharing a characteristic of myself that makes me different from them, yet I do move from the topic of blindness to other things about me. I begin by showing a PowerPoint about myself with pictures of my family, hobbies, and interests. They can see some of my favorite books and movies, that I enjoy cooking, exercising, shopping, and then they see a picture of me helping a little girl learn how to use a cane. I talk about being legally blind, which means that I do have some vision but it's not reliable. I explain that I probably see about 5% of what they do and tell them about having glaucoma develop from cataracts at birth. I explain that

> blindness is a characteristic, not a tragedy, and that I've learned alternative techniques to navigate in a visual world. I talk about Braille, and I proceed to read through the seating chart in Braille. I show them my Braille watch and talk about using speech on a computer. I give them a chance to ask questions, which some classes take and others hold back.

By openly discussing her blindness with students, she is practicing proactive inclusiveness. Like many teachers, however, Lisa maintains a distinct boundary between her lives in and out of school. Aside from her initial offerings to students at the start of the school year, Lisa keeps her personal life closely guarded. One day, after a student had googled all of his teachers, he announced to her that he had been following her Twitter feed and could quote several recent posts. "And I just freaked out. And I know that something like that, maybe some people it wouldn't bother and they would just be like, 'So what? It's not a big deal.' But in my mind it really is. It really is a clear separation."

While this is a natural boundary for a teacher to have with her students, I could not help but think of it in terms of this research. Lisa was the most reticent to engage in the interviews. She tries very hard to not be thought of as outside her community.

On negotiating her identity as a teacher who can be considered an "other," Lisa says, "[You must engage in] working harder to reach what it is you want. This means figuring out the system and then figuring out how to succeed either within or despite the system."

One way that she can connect with her students is by leveraging insider characteristics. As a female whose ethnic background is similar to that of many of her students, Lisa can gain a foothold in the classroom. She can connect with them based on a similar ethnic background, and also as one who enjoys pursuits that many students might readily identify with—cooking, shopping, and exercising. These characteristics may help Lisa to normalize herself in the eyes of her students. They help the students see past her blindness.

And just as she challenges herself with overcoming expectations and not being categorized, one of her main professional dilemmas involves the teaching of students in the special education program at her school. Such students take her English classes, and she describes her thoughts about teaching them. As she describes:

> I struggle tremendously with how to make the modifications for them without lowering the expectations. And I know that part of what influences that is my work with other blind people, I've seen time and time again. And it goes back to the way that people have low expectations for people who are blind. And so my natural reaction against this is to create really high expectations and to help people reach those. [. . .] If someone really has a disability in writing, . . . I don't want to have lower expectations of them. I don't want to have them do fewer assignments, because they are going to have to navigate their own lives. So they need to figure out how they can do the things they need to do in any given situation. And I feel like if I as the teacher let them out of something, that I'm really doing them a disservice.

Lisa works hard to make sure that her students are held to the same standards as others and to not treat them as less capable. Just as she endeavors to pass these traits on to her students, I cannot help but marvel at how difficult it must be. As I have read and reread Lisa's words and tried to gain a better sense of her work, I have been struck by the ways in which my own classroom teaching has often relied so heavily on physical, spatial, and even nonverbal elements. I have often used eye contact to connect with a student across the room, employed facial expressions I hoped were communicating important messages: "Remember what we talked about? You're supposed to be reading now." I have considered the layout of the room as a conduit of physical and spatial signals to students, telling them, "stand here," "sit there," "now, focus your attention this way." Lisa's narration of her experiences tells me that there exist subtler forms of communication I have not yet begun to consider.

Many would easily impose the "outsider" label on Lisa based upon her blindness—I certainly did. Lisa's response to this has been to refuse the term itself—to insist on insider-level participation. Lisa's difference, her otherness, informs her pedagogy to a great extent. Just as with other participants, Lisa's experiences allow her to empathize with students and to develop pedagogical practices to better connect with them.

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CHAPTER 6

Teacher Narrative: Winnie

Abstract Winnie is an African American woman who came to teaching after a successful first career in finance. She is an outsider in the school where she teaches a largely Latino population with a faculty of younger, white teachers. She initially rejects the term "outsider," but after consideration and study, embraces it as a strength. In her school, Winnie is a sought-after educator and models positive, inclusive interactions for her students as well as other teachers.

Keywords Race • Class • Age • Teacher relationships

You have to let go, and I think that because I started teaching late, I don't have all that old-school stuff. [. . .] I don't mind letting the child teach my class, and I don't mind learning. [. . .] I don't mind saying that I don't know everything.

Winnie teaches English at a Catholic high school in a large suburb of an East Coast city. The student body consists of a near-split between low-income African American and Latino children. About 250 students attend, and almost all qualify for free lunch.

Like her students, Winnie comes from a low-income, urban background. She shares a racial identity with her African American students, and working-class roots with them all. She does not share her Latino students' culture

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or language. Similarly, while she, like many of her students, is a practicing Christian, their Catholic traditions are foreign to her Baptist upbringing.

Winnie is the oldest faculty member at the school by several decades, working among a young, mostly white teaching staff, though Winnie's petite frame and stylish dress project the appearance of someone much younger, as do her energetic manner and friendly, optimistic tone. An outsider among her middle-class white colleagues, Winnie believes that her experience, combined with her positive rapport with students, has earned her the respect of her colleagues, who frequently seek her advice concerning pedagogy.

Before I pressed the red "record" button at our first interview, I mentioned apologetically that I would try to keep my comments to a minimum, so as not to take up too much "talk time." Smiling, she responded, "Just be you."

Despite her ease interacting with people, being a teacher did not come easily for Winnie. It was not the ability that she lacked, "It's just in me, if that makes sense to you," she says. Nor was it a lack of desire. "From early childhood, I wanted to be a teacher," was one of the first things Winnie told me about herself. Despite the ability and desire, classroom teaching was not her first—or even second—career.

She left a job in finance—one of the first African Americans to manage the large budget at the agency where she worked—to start a small daycare center at home, and began teaching children from her neighborhood. After earning her early childhood license, she made the decision to go to school. Winnie took weekend and evening courses—a full course load—while working full time and raising her children. "I never thought I would get an undergrad let alone a grad degree," she says. She tells the story this way:

> It was just something that I always wanted to do. I always wanted to be a teacher, but growing up in a poor neighborhood and not having the funds to go to college after high school, you had to work. I went that path of working and having a family. [. . .] I went to undergrad at 46 years old to pursue an English literature major, and then decided to go to grad school because if you want to teach I think you need to go to grad school, too.

Describing the early days of her master's program, she mentions attending her first class and hearing "about 15 words that I hadn't heard of in my life, so I wrote them down." Her professor told the group that only a small part of the population has a master's degree, and she imagined herself as a part of that percentage. Winnie completed her master's and has been teaching for seven years.

In addition to her formal training, Winnie describes a process of "letting go" that has helped her to develop into the effective teacher she is now:

> You have to let go, and I think that because I started teaching late, I don't have all that old-school stuff. [. . .] I don't mind letting the child teach my class, and I don't mind learning. [. . .] I don't mind saying that I don't know everything.

The vulnerability Winnie exhibits by admitting that there are things she doesn't know helps her connect to her students. Moreover, knowing that many of them have experienced a feeling of disenfranchisement when interacting with teachers and other authority figures, Winnie approaches each student first, she says, "as a human being." She describes her work with them as "pulling people into the fold," a strength that she feels stems from her experience as an outsider. Ultimately, Winnie is propelled by a deep desire to motivate her students. She describes feeling a special connection to her current students, but talking to her for any length of time gives a definite sense that Winnie has felt a deep connection to every student she has taught.

Winnie comes across as very genuine in the way she strives to connect with other people. She looks for common ground. For one year, she taught in a white, rural area of her state. Winnie's students returned to school that fall, having just completed *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (one of her favorites), as part of their summer reading assignment. She was the only black teacher in the school, and her students were visibly nervous when the time came to discuss the text.

Winnie confronted the reticent students about their lack of involvement. Finally, they admitted to a fear of using the N-word in her presence while discussing the text. Laughing, Winnie describes telling them how, as a child, she, too, was forbidden from using the word, but that its presence in this literary masterpiece held important meaning that should not be ignored.

"I told them, 'Just don't call me one,'" she recounts, laughing. "Don't say it unless we're talking about literature, and we're good."

"Look at Huckleberry Finn," she told her students. "He was abused. He just had all these issues and concerns. It was he and this black man saving each other." Alluding to the editions of the text published recently in which the N-word was edited out, Winnie describes the importance of its presence. "I think that we're going to be having that conversation for the next century, but hopefully we can have it in a good, civil way." She says, "No, we've got to keep that word in there."

Winnie taught her students about the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's funeral for the N-word, and she emphasized with them that the silence around it might be giving the word itself more power than it deserved. "We are in a new age, a new generation, a new generation of thinkers, and we just have to stop giving power to so much stuff and bring some good energy in there."

This is how Winnie talks—full of excitement and all-encompassing enthusiasm for her work. Winnie tells a story of reaching out to a group of rural white students—as possibly the only African American teacher they would have—and her eyes dance. "It was fun just being the only African American at that school teaching Huckleberry Finn." I get the sense that her fearless-seeming optimism is her own source of mischievous pleasure. She dares to connect with people against any odds she might face.

As the school year continued, parents began requesting that the administration move their children into Winnie's class. Tension ensued among other members of the English department, and Winnie felt guilty when her assigned mentor began losing students to her. Winnie's student-centered approach to teaching English had won favor among local families whose children had become excited about her class. She describes meeting this challenging situation with a constructive spirit—taking the time to share her feelings with the mentor teacher and ultimately also sharing her instructional style. As her mentor began to adopt some of the teaching practices Winnie used, that teacher's students became more engaged too.

In her current school, Winnie navigates insider and outsider roles every day. She interacts with much younger, white colleagues from more privileged backgrounds, while teaching students from similar economic circumstances with a variety of racial and ethnic identities. She speaks of maintaining a balance, in which she counsels students of color who come to her when they have problems interacting with their white teachers. She strives to build a collegial atmosphere, and finds herself giving advice to both her students and their teachers on how they can improve relationships by working together.

For example, she admonishes one student to stop complaining about all the work another teacher has assigned. "You know, you really need that," she says. "I wish I'd had that, and when I was in school, no one taught me, and I had to learn that stuff at an old age, and you all know how old I am."

Winnie also walks the line between the roles of teacher and facilitator in her classroom. She rejects the notion that teachers must function as the keepers of knowledge, instead emphasizing the empowerment of students to seek information to teach themselves and one another. Winnie speaks of

the "bad and sad baggage" that many students bring to school, in the form of difficult home lives and struggles with poverty:

> When you teach English, you really get to the heart of students because they share so much with you in their writing. By accident, you just learn so much about them that you can [use to] help other teachers, "Hey you know, this kid is having some problems, and you're strong in that area so you might want to talk to him if you can. But don't let him know I said anything." You know, that kind of thing. Just kind of helping other teachers with students.

Just as Winnie learned and used unexpected things from the writings of her students, I unexpectedly learned things from my interactions with her. Winnie admitted that she had objected to the term "outsider," at the start of the study.

Not only did she not like the term, but she found it almost offensive, "like the N-word."

I asked her why she took part in spite of her concerns, and she said the concept had intrigued her nonetheless. She had also trusted that I must be onto something, because a mutual contact—one of my professors—had introduced us. This professor had conducted a previous research project in which Winnie had participated, and the experience had been a positive one. Having Winne tell me that she initially considered my use of the term "outsider" equivalent to one of the most hateful words in our language was disorienting. I worried that I had offended her and felt humiliated at that prospect. I felt exposed. My initial reaction was to convince myself that she probably wouldn't "fit in" to the study if she didn't consider herself part of the study group. Then I realized that, despite her reservations, Winnie had agreed to work with me. I owed her the same. We were both going to enter that uncomfortable space, just outside our comfort zones, where real learning and growth occur.

As I further examined my feelings, I also discovered a fear that I might be compared to the professor, a more experienced researcher than I, and that I might come short. I also worried that if Winnie did not enjoy the experience of participating in my research or continued to feel offended by my terminology, it might negatively affect her previous relationship with one of my mentors, and that I might be shown to be a less than adequate researcher.

I held onto these feelings and considered them. I remembered, finally, that the narrative inquiry process can be a complex one, and I thought that perhaps Winnie's dissent—and forthrightness—were really gifts. I looked

more carefully at the situation and felt grateful that she had shared her feelings with such candor, that she had trusted me enough to disclose so many personal experiences.

And it was a collaborative experience. When Winnie mentioned that a large portion of her students were Latino, thus of a very different background from hers, I shared the study entitled "Effective White Teachers of Latino/a Students" by Marx (2008).

The more I had learned about Winnie's background and her relationships with her students, the more I realized that the struggles she had experienced enabled her to connect with them in a way similar to the teachers profiled by Marx, who found that outsider teachers cited as favorites among their Latino students had all experienced adversity in their own lives. These adverse experiences had helped the teachers to empathize with their students and earn their trust. This happened in spite of their outsider status in the students' community and students' negative associations with previous outsider teachers.

Quite unexpectedly to me, Winnie circulated the Marx study among her white colleagues. Over several weeks between our interviews, she discussed the study with the other teachers and found that her colleagues could relate to it. Winnie found that this catalyzed many helpful exchanges of ideas. She describes the conversations that ensued:

> A lot of our teachers are white and they're teaching mostly Hispanic and African American students. They'd never even thought about that term either. [As they read the article], a lot of them were saying, "Yeah, I definitely feel this. Oh, I definitely feel like an outsider." I had told them, "I'm not an outsider," but then after really going through this article I thought, "Man, I am an outsider." And they were feeling the same way but it sort of validated a lot of their thoughts, a lot of their fears.

As she confronted her discomfort with the term, "outsider," Winnie began to reconsider her identity in relation to her students. Although she shared their socioeconomic background, she realized that she could no longer take for granted the seamless insider status she had been assuming that she held. She described her thought process:

> This is making me reflect more on when I'm inside that classroom or outside of the classroom. What am I doing? What are the students doing? What are they allowing me to do? This gives me something else to think about,

> something else to focus on in my teaching and in my interaction with my students and with teachers and administrators and everything that surrounds teaching.

Early in the study, when I introduced the idea of being an outsider teacher and had asked Winnie to describe her relationships with students, she had categorized them by saying, "You know, when I see kids I just see the kids, I don't see the fact that 'Wow, there are a lot of Hispanic kids here, you know, or African American kids.'"

As we spoke about her history as a teacher and her perspective on the Marx (2008) study, she began to reevaluate her identity in the classroom. Winnie had regarded herself as an insider among the students in a way that she felt her white colleagues could not. Her perspective was changing. Her identity kept her from being an insider with every one of her students, but perhaps the very skills she had cultivated as an outsider enabled her to better connect with them all.

> I hadn't really thought about outsider status until you introduced me to that idea. A lot of my students speak Spanish during the transition between classes, and I don't know Spanish, so I wonder what they are talking about. And just from their tone and body language, it doesn't seem to be anything I should be concerned about, but I do feel like that outsider, and maybe that's where I belong, you know? I am an outsider and it's not a bad thing being an outsider. Because the word is now making me think, how do I get inside?

After consideration, Winnie emphasized the importance of recognizing one's outsider status and developing the skills needed to overcome it. Winnie's realization of the factors of her identity that set her apart from her students reaffirmed her commitment to self-improvement as a practitioner in an effort to enhance her communication in the classroom.

This fits nicely with her teaching philosophy, which puts the onus on educators to learn about their students in order to earn their trust and appropriately tailor instruction to their needs. She speaks about this as one who is aware of the exclusion faced by many of society's outsiders when interacting with institutions like schools.

> I think sometimes teachers come into the classroom and they just want to open the textbook first and give the lesson. But kids aren't going to trust you until you prove that you can be trusted. And so it's just getting to know them and opening up and letting them know who you are first, not only as a teacher.

> Most people are intimidated by teachers—especially the population that we teach. Students and their families are intimidated by teachers. I get to know my audience as best as I can so that I don't feel like I'm up there threatening anybody. And I don't like to feel important anyway, you know? I like to make other people feel like they are more important than I am.

Winnie feels close to her students. She describes a desire to "give her power away" to them, and to use her commonalities to reach them. "I don't like to make students feel less than who they are. They come from an environment that says they are less than. I think I am aware of that because I came from that environment, but I think that other people who did not come from that environment, it's extra stuff that we all have to do to make she that we are being respectful of the students." When students come to her to confide about their anger at white teachers in the school, she listens and then reminds them that these teachers "care for you just as I care for you."

Winnie expresses admiration for her colleagues because "they could go and teach anywhere, and they choose to come to that school where we have gang violence all around the community."

Winnie invites these teachers to come to her classroom, where she mingles with students, sitting among them, encouraging them to teach one another, sharing her power, and the teachers take note of her closeness with students. They comment on the way she will approach a tough looking kid and quietly get him to tuck his uniform shirt into his pants. She encourages the younger teachers to loosen up and give students more space while encouraging students to meet their other teachers halfway.

To further connect with her students, Winnie draws on her own experiences, growing up "poor" and feeling uncomfortable at school. She recalls crying every day at school and feeling thankful that her teachers were willing to comfort her, but knowing that she wanted to be at home. Although she was a good student, Winnie did not like being at school, and she thinks of this still and tries to create the comfortable atmosphere for her students that her teachers created for her.

She acknowledges the pressures beyond socioeconomic status that many of them face. "I have students who are still in gangs and students who are trying to get out of gangs. I can read those faces, I can read those attitudes, and I can read that body language and their reactions to me. And so I've got to all at once have this persona that says 'I know you,' so that they can sit back and relax and not feel threatened." In this way, she still uses her insider status to relate.

She describes the practice of being patient with students who come to class late, knowing that sometimes a lack of bus fare or family responsibilities may be to blame. Knowing how easy it is for her students to feel excluded, she carefully approaches them, letting them know that they were missed and that she can help them to catch up on missed work.

Winnie identifies in particular with other outsiders among her students. She told me about an African American boy with autism who had difficulty with social interactions and at first was not accepted by his peers. Making a point of including this student as an active, vocal member of the class and helping him to find his niche, Winnie remarks that this student gradually, over the course of the school year, began to come out of his shell, participate more in classroom activities, and develop more connections with his classmates.

Winnie describes a bond she cultivated with another student through his journaling in class. The student, a Latino boy, had been suffering with anxiety attacks all year. His mother had been diagnosed with cancer, and he was frightened at the thought of losing her and being left alone. Winnie noticed a disconnect between the boy's claims of being "fine" and his body language, which "spoke differently." One day, the boy volunteered to share his journal entry with the class. As Winnie recounts:

> He opened our class discussion and shared his experiences with his mom as she struggles through the pain and aggravation of her weekly treatments. [. . .] Not only did this particular student open up to me, but his writing ability improved tremendously. Writing was a challenge for him and writing about his mom helped him to develop the academic confidence he would need for his first year of high school.

It is through activities like this that Winnie seeks to create safe spaces for her students to share about themselves and their experiences. In creating these safe space, she is also cognizant of her responsibility to proactively teach inclusiveness. For example, she feels the responsibility to tackle issues of sexism and homophobia that she sees within her students' cultures.

Winnie's inclusiveness and openness have made her a welcomed and respected member of her school's community.

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CHAPTER 7

Teacher Narrative: Kyong

Abstract Kyong, an Asian American from a middle-class background, teaches in a low-income suburban community on the East coast of the United States. While his school is more racially diverse than many, it does not include a large portion of Asian Americans. Kyong describes his evolution as a graduate student and teacher. He demonstrates a keen understanding of power dynamics and the necessity for inclusiveness.

Keywords Race • Class

Having teachers in the building who [racially] reflect the children gives them a pretty tangible example of what they can amount to. I definitely see the value in it, but at the same time, I don't know if it's feasible to be striving for that.

Kyong is in his mid-20s, and he teaches at an arts magnet middle school in a suburb of a large East Coast city. The student body there consists primarily of Latino, African American, and white students. The school is fairly racially diverse. Kyong, however, is Asian American, one of the groups significantly underrepresented in this student population. His middle-class upbringing further differentiates him from many of his students of working-class, low-income backgrounds, about one-half of whom receive free or reduced-price lunch.

He has been teaching in this school for the past two years, though it is his third year teaching, having spent a year teaching English in South Korea, his

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family's country of origin. For his first teaching assignment, Kyong spent one year at a school in South Korea. At this school, he taught conversational English to middle school boys. Kyong then returned to the USA to earn his master's degree in education and pursue a teaching career.

After college, he had initially pursued a career in law, realizing after two years that this path was not for him.

As a child in the USA with parents who were immigrants, Kyong had spent time helping them with their communication in English, in particular, their writing. Both of his parents were college professors, and communicating in English was important to their own career success. Kyong found that he was engaged in his parents' careers and he describes the experience, saying, "It's kind of interesting, because it's almost like I was learning when I was helping my parents." He credits this experience with his decision to become a teacher.

I met Kyong several summers ago as he was studying to become a teacher. He was my student in a graduate course I was teaching. He distinguished himself from among the other students in the group with an affably reserved exterior, which he maintained during class discussions and casual interactions. He was quiet and introverted, but it was always clear that he was engaged and actively paying attention.

On several notable occasions, the perceptive, sharp individual dwelling under the placid exterior surfaced. One day, a student sitting next to him tossed out a bigoted comment about bad Asian drivers. Dropped into the inclusive environment cultivated among the members of this diversity class, the comment elicited a collective gasp. The student's face flushed as he turned to Kyong. "I'm so sorry," he said.

Kyong nodded at him, saying nothing. The student seemed to squirm for a moment, waiting, and finally, Kyong replied, "It's okay."

There was well-timed humor in the length of time Kyong had forced his classmate to wait—the pause seemed to make just enough room for the absurdity of the student's comment to sink in, along with the added illogic of making amends to the one Asian person in the room and Kyong's sole ability to absolve him of his mistake. It diffused the situation, but it also became a moment of heightened awareness and learning.

In one of our last meetings, Kyong's turn came to give a presentation to the group. I had encouraged students to see these presentations not only as requirements to report out their findings, but as opportunities to rehearse some of the teaching techniques we had discussed while they had the benefit of a room full of willing participants.

Kyong took charge of the group immediately. Once he began his introduction, the degree to which he had been thoughtfully observing his classmates became evident. Built into his report were direct messages to his classmates. For example, when introducing a particularly progressive idea, Kyong requested that one of the more conservative students in the group wait before responding—knowing that student's tendency to dominate class discussions.

The comment caught us all off guard, and the group—including the student he was speaking to—erupted with laughter. In his first moments leading the class, Kyong unraveled an underlying tension that had been building all month. The entire presentation held the same spirited tone, with Kyong calmly and confidently leading the group, comfortable in the role of teacher. The class was his to teach.

Throughout his presentation, Kyong continued to redirect the dominant personalities who had tended to monopolize discussions. He provided multiple opportunities for the quieter students to share. His leadership gave us the opportunity to function in a manner that diverged from our well-established patterns. Kyong's approach demonstrated an ability to observe insider and outsider dynamics and leverage insider characteristics, and the use of proactive inclusiveness: He knew his audience well, having paid attention to their personalities and behaviors. He used his familiarity to speak directly to individuals and preempt potential derailments, and he made space for sharing among the shy member of the group. He carries these same skills and observational sensitivities into his classroom teaching.

As part of Kyong's graduate studies, he conducted a research project based on his memories of an outsider at a younger age and his observations of student interactions in the classroom. Kyong had noticed that certain students in his classes demanded "more attention" than the others—that these extroverted students exhibited behaviors that enabled teachers to get a better sense of their personal issues as well as their academic ability. This left students with more reserved personalities on the margins of classroom activity, at a distance from their teachers. Their lack of participation in classroom discussions also kept Kyong from getting a clear understanding of their opinions, comprehension, and skill development. Kyong created a journal writing practice, in which students held ongoing conversations with one another in written form. This way, students who held back from speaking up in class could engage in exchanges of ideas

with more outspoken students, overcoming difference to interact in meaningful ways.

These "outsider students" reminded Kyong of himself at their age. An Asian American boy attending primarily white schools with white teachers, he had tended to keep to himself in the classroom, allowing teachers to turn their attention to the students whose personalities expanded to fill the space.

And then as a teacher, Kyong found himself interacting mainly with the students who demanded his attention—"the loud ones and the ones who always get in trouble"—his research project was designed specifically for the outsiders within that group. He explains, "one thing I noticed is that a lot of the kids in my classes who weren't very outspoken could very articulately express their thoughts in writing."

The use of journals in his English class allowed quieter students to hold written conversations with their classmates. Kyong monitored these journals to gain information about the progress and development of the more reserved students to allow them a creative means to express themselves, take on academic challenges, and connect with their classmates and teacher. Kyong agrees that this idea comes from the student he once was—an introverted Asian American outsider among a largely white student population.

In addition to creating safe spaces for including the quieter students to interact, Kyong leverages insider characteristics, and relating to the students through past memories. Kyong's relative youth has helped him to feel connected to his students—perhaps more so than some of his older colleagues. Although some Asian American students attend the school, it is Kyong's age that has become an insider characteristic that he uses to establish rapport with young people.

By leveraging insider characteristics, Kyong connects with some of the students who need his attention most. Saying "You have to look back in order to proceed with working with any children" is one way Kyong describes the need for teachers to find within themselves the commonalities they all share with their students: They were once that age, and they experienced the angst of adolescence just as their students do. The circumstances of their lives may differ, but that stage of life unites us all.

Before our conversations, Kyong had just read *The Students are Watching* (1999) for another graduate course, and he mentioned his appreciation of the way in which the text places the reader into the mind of an adolescent struggling in a mainstream US public high school.

Kyong points out the fact that adolescence is difficult for most people, and that this experience gives nearly all teachers a way to overcome outsider status and connect with their students. According to him:

> Especially in secondary education, there is that factor of adolescence. We've all been through it and not many of us take pleasure in revisiting it. For many of us, it was awful—a period where we don't understand everything, and every small issue or problem is magnified tremendously because of our limited perspective. To understand kids, we have to remember what it was like to be a kid and to feel their anxieties. And I think no matter how much generations change, there is definitely a level of fundamental behaviors and sentiments that children feel and that they go through in social settings like school. And some of those things I don't feel will ever change.

Kyong describes a practice of relating through past experiences that can help educators better understand and connect with their students. Age is the outsider characteristic that defines all teachers, and he points out the importance of not only recalling our own adolescence as a means to empathize with our students, but also looking at the experience with a critical eye. Kyong describes his own experiences as a student:

> As a middle and high school student, I really didn't interact with teachers all that much. I have a pretty irrational fear of authority and I really didn't talk to teachers outside of what was necessary as far as participation in class.

He leverages this experience to ensure that all of his students are included in class projects and discussions. He remembers what it is like to not be engaged.

In addition to leveraging his introversion and youth, he also acknowledges that his gender and overall classification as a person of color might have also given him a degree of influence within the context of a school that a female teacher might lack. As he says:

> I think I see a lot of who I used to be in the very small contingent of Asian American and Asian students at our school, males in particular. But I think that as a minority, there are expectations that you connect to minority males as a whole. And the demographics at our school are very much dominated by Hispanic and African American students. So I guess it's interesting because I don't really have a really strong connection to the Asian American students, and I definitely find myself reaching out more to the Hispanic and African American students.

Although he shares the designation of "person of color" with his black and Latino students, however, their socioeconomic classes divide them.

For example, he describes growing up in an environment where education was promoted to a far greater extent. Although Kyong felt that he was an outsider at his mostly-white schools, he was nonetheless expected to achieve success in his studies. His specific outsiderness came with an expectation that he would excel in school. He does not recall a specific moment at which this set of values was communicated to him—only that it defined his upbringing. Growing up, Kyong had a family whose means enabled them to live in an area with higher-quality public schools. He recalls never doubting that he would attend college.

Faced with students whose childhoods are defined by existential struggle in a way that he has never known, Kyong has learned to keep an open mind as he comes to understand the difficult realities faced by many of his students. He explains:

> I think one of the most essential strengths that has taken me through the year is cultural sensitivity and just being able to adapt and be aware of where students might be coming from. Even though it's new to me personally, I think I have a pretty strong awareness that things here are different. And while it's internally a little shocking, externally, I take it in stride because I understand that our students, and their circumstances at home are nothing like what I may have experienced.

Kyong recognizes that he is a societal "insider," having advantages and opportunities not available to all of his students. This "insider" status in a community of outsiders, however, makes him an outsider. Regarding the term "outsider," Kyong says:

> I don't take issue with it because I think it reflects a reality. I think it definitely says something about who we are. It's not meant to be divisive, I think. It just really conveys the sense that we are different from who our students are. I almost feel like that sense of reality's necessary, especially if you're trying to gain an understanding of who you are and how you approach your practice and who your students are. Because if you don't understand that dynamic, that's where the biggest struggle might surface.

Kyong intimates that outsider teachers are unavoidable to some extent. He mentions that all teachers are significantly older than their students and "you bring a different perspective and you grew up in a different age."

As an outsider at different points throughout his life, Kyong developed the skills he would need to move past being different and become a highly educated professional. His role as a teacher has influenced his sense of self. In addition to his other personal characteristics, he sees his profession as a part of his identity. As he describes it:

> Being placed in a role where you're responsible for the education of young people certainly changes your perspective on your larger role in society. I've gained a sense that almost everything I do outside my school building is still a part of my profession. I don't want to say it's changed the decisions I've made, but I'm very cognizant of who I am as a role model in addition to being an educator. I see my students at the mall, and I feel that I should reflect the same person that I reflect in the classroom. And if not, there's an inconsistency there that makes me less genuine, and I feel like being genuine and authentic is one of the most important qualities for students to see in teachers. I think being an educator is a very all-encompassing, very holistic type of profession that consumes your everyday existence. So I guess you don't leave your work at the school and in essence, it's not really work, you know; it's just more of your life.

Just as when he was a child helping his parents with their written English, Kyong continues to discover places beyond the classroom where teaching and learning occur. He also sees himself as a community member with ongoing contributions to make in the lives of young people.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion: Lessons Learned and Implications for Future Scholarship

Abstract Makris suggests pedagogical applications based on the effective traits exhibited by outsider teachers in this study, including practicing proactive inclusiveness, leveraging outsider characteristics, relating through past experiences, and observing the interplay of outsider/insider dynamics. Additionally, she makes the argument for further study of this growing group of educators, emphasizing the need for applying intersectionality theory and the effectiveness of narrative inquiry as a research methodology. The chapter concludes with a personal narrative demonstrating application of the lessons.

Keywords Intersectionality • Narrative inquiry • Personal narrative

This book, and the stories herein, examines the ways that outsider teachers define themselves, are identified within their environments, and experience and discuss their work in classrooms. It evolved from my experience as an outsider teacher among my own students.

In presenting the stories of these outsider teachers, I hope to have created a complete picture of these people as individuals, not token spokespeople for the groups represented by one or two of their characteristics. I did this in the interest of discovering implications for pedagogy, but it is also an effort to further the use of intersectionality theory in the discipline of education, where it may help to shed light on the ebb and flow of identity characteristics that takes place in classrooms every day.

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While each participant is a unique and multifaceted individual, some lessons emerge from their commonalities. Each participant takes cues from his or her experiences and transforms them into effective tools for connecting with students.

Teachers of all backgrounds can learn to use these tools. They include practicing proactive inclusiveness, leveraging outsider characteristics, relating through past experiences, and observing the interplay of outsider/insider dynamics. These benefits to teachers, students, and schools make, I believe, a compelling argument for a broadening of the field of educational research to include increased diversity of participants, but also for use of narrative inquiry as a research method and an embrace of intersectionality as a framework.

Practicing Proactive Inclusiveness

The teachers profiled in this study all show evidence of proactive inclusiveness in their classrooms. The "initiation of relationships" described by Valenzuela (1999) denotes the effort on the part of teachers to get to know their students better in order to teach them more effectively. Ladson-Billings (2009) cites caring and learning about student cultures and communities as keys to good teaching.

The proactive inclusiveness I have identified among the teachers profiled here emerges from the "outsider" or "other" experience. This perspective not only informs the teaching of a group of students who are different from the teacher, but also informs teaching as an endeavor that aims to reach students different from the teacher, their communities, each other. This approach does not look at the students in a class as a single entity—a monolithic culture to be demystified and accessed by a willing outsider—it looks to teach all of the students in a single classroom. The significance of this approach contrasts somewhat with efforts at culturally responsive teaching. It does not contradict those efforts but enhances them. Culturally responsive teaching promotes the notion that teachers should prepare for students whose race, ethnicity, and culture are different from their own.

In another illustration of proactive inclusiveness, bell hooks (2003) describes the experience of encountering unexpected homophobia in her classroom when she teaches James Baldwin to students of color, who, she assumes, are aware of his sexual orientation. hooks describes her subsequent attempt to teach the students in a way that encourages them to think of others as potentially being present in the room. She notes the importance of

not ignoring the students' words, rather of taking on the hateful viewpoints and pushing against them. The work hooks speaks of, the loving insistence on a welcoming, open space, is echoed in the words of participants in this research.

Proactive inclusiveness looks at students as potentially more complex individuals—individuals who may belong to a racial group but whose sexual orientation, for example, may cause them to face rejection among members of their community. Proactive inclusiveness, as practiced by the teachers in this study, anticipates many identities and the possibility that group membership is neither uniform nor unconditional. Proactive inclusiveness combines the observational strategies, in which a teacher listens carefully and learns as much as possible about her students, with the inherent knowledge that, within every group, certain individuals are outsiders. The behaviors inherent in proactive inclusion seek to combat the situation Paley (1979) describes, in which teachers limit their expectations of certain students and fail to take risks with those students on the basis of difference. Proactive inclusiveness describes a pattern of seeking out marginalized students and making room for them while challenging the rest of the students to increase their awareness and interrogate their taken-for-granted beliefs.

Jamie creates a "safe space" for students by explaining that words with "a history of hate" are inappropriate in his classroom. He also seeks the opinions of outsider students while refraining from asking that they represent the interests of others like them. Because of his own experience as an outsider, Jamie believes that students who are outsiders long to be included, and so he consistently invites all students to share their thoughts.

Lisa uses her experience as an "other" to similarly inform her teaching. Early in the school year, she creates opportunities for students to share unusual aspects of themselves with her, emphasizing the importance of a classroom that is open to all students and multiple perspectives. She reaches out to students with anxiety and those who have social difficulties, knowing that these issues can leave young people excluded in a school community. She anticipates that socially awkward and anxious students will enter her classroom, and she makes herself explicitly available to them.

Maria draws upon her experiences as an outsider to inform her practice. She emphasizes earning her students' trust by making herself available as a confidante and refraining from making assumptions about students. Maria also brings integrity to her interactions with students, not avoiding controversial topics, but rather approaching them with an air of responsibility, seeing her role as one who can open students' minds and encourage them to

reflect on ignorant beliefs and practices that they may be accepting at face value.

Winnie allows multiple outsider experiences to influence her work in the classroom. She tries to remain approachable and to respect students, thus earning their trust. She also fosters a sense of community in the classroom, where everyone has a role to play, and everyone is a valued member of the group.

Kyong sees himself in his students. He recalls his own days as an outsider student, and he uses his experiences to develop inclusive approaches to learning. His awareness of the outsider experience has enabled him to conceive of opportunities to include different types of learners in the ongoing conversation of a classroom. He seeks ways to include the most reluctant contributors, knowing that quiet students are often overlooked because their behavior presents less of a challenge to teachers.

By following the words of bell hooks and of the teachers who participated in this study, teachers can adopt proactive inclusiveness as standard classroom practice.

Leveraging Insider Characteristics

The teachers in this study showed an awareness not only of the characteristics that set them apart from their students but also of those commonalities that joined them. Perhaps as a function of negotiating their outsider identities, they had all cultivated a clear inventory of personal qualities: those that presented potential obstacles, those that brought them closer to students, and, in some cases, those that elevated their status.

Participants described use of insider characteristics to gain trust and acceptance among students. Despite being outsiders in some ways, there were still ways they managed to connect. Jamie faces a high number of outsider characteristics separating him not only from his students, but also from the entire school community in which he teaches. To navigate his way through the characteristics that set him apart from students—race, class, and sexual orientation—Jamie relies on his youth and shared interest in popular culture to provide the common ground with his students that will enable communication and shared understanding. He acknowledges the power that comes with being a male teacher. He also leverages the weight of having a Ph.D., to shift students toward a more respectful stance, and away from inappropriately familiar interactions based in their stereotypes of African American maleness.

Lisa's blindness is the obvious characteristic that sets her apart from her students. As she introduces herself to students for the first time, she accesses more mainstream aspects of herself—a traditionally female gender identity and interests in "normal" hobbies that her students can relate to. This sharing helps her students to "get past" her disability and connect with her in a more meaningful way.

Maria is separated from her students and many members of her school community by her sexual orientation and nontraditional gender identity. Although she does not openly share her sexuality with her students, she has encountered difficult confrontations at her school, resulting from assumptions based on her outward appearance. Maria develops trust and closeness with her students by accessing the elements of herself that her students can relate to: shared racial identity, struggles in her youth, and a similar socioeconomic background.

Winnie's race separates her from her colleagues and many of her students. Her age is also a divisive factor. By drawing on a shared working-class background, Winnie can anticipate many potential student concerns and prepare for them. She also bonds with her students as a teacher of color whom they can trust.

Like Jamie, Kyong leverages his youth to connect with students of different races and ethnicities. Spending a large part of his time with Latino and African American students, Kyong cannot rely on his race to create an instant connection—he uses the aspects of his identity that link him to the students to allow trusting relationships to develop.

When teachers teach students among whom they can be considered outsiders based on at least one identity characteristic, these teachers may choose to take stock of the many qualities that define them. By considering all aspects of themselves—age, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and ethnicity—teachers access characteristics that will help them form connections. This can help to develop the trust that must exist in order for learning to take place.

Relating Through Past Experiences

The teachers who participated in this study may have had more experiences with adversity than others, but they all discussed ways in which they used these experiences to develop empathy, observational skills, and deeper connections with students. Among the literature reviewed here, only the Marx (2008) study documents such an approach among outsider teachers.

Marx (2008) found that one of her successful white teachers of Latino students had struggled with drug addiction. This teacher felt that the difficult experience enabled her to empathize with and relate to her students' struggles in a way that perhaps other whites might not have been able to.

Maria's early life experiences are cornerstones of her relationships with students, and of her identity as a teacher. She recalls growing up in the neighborhood that surrounds her school, and understands many of the issues her students confront each day.

Kyong speaks of encouraging teachers—even those whose identities are not marginalized—to access experiences of struggle in their own lives. He suggests that all teachers can connect with the struggles faced by adolescents. For example, the factor of age that makes all teachers outsiders among their students comes with the benefit of having also experienced childhood and adolescence. Because all teachers had to experience childhood and adolescence in order to become adults, they have all experienced the difficulties inherent in these periods of growth and uncertainty.

Teachers may find that they can enhance their practice by calling to mind their own personal struggles—with adolescence and otherwise. Memory of the feelings of isolation that come with life's challenges, and knowledge that the experience of such challenges connects us all, can help teachers to overcome differences and connect with students.

Observing the Interplay of Outsider/Insider Dynamics

Understanding what it means to be an outsider has helped these teachers create a hyperawareness of the various roles people play in group settings. Because the teachers profiled here all had experiences as outsiders or others, they seemed more tuned in than most to the group dynamics that defined outsider and insider status. Having been conscious of their own marginalized status has made them conscious of this same scenario playing out around them.

The outsider teachers profiled in this book use their understanding of insider/outsider dynamics to address the imbalances that arise in the group settings of their classrooms. Addressing the needs of outsiders who feel distant is one aspect of this approach. As outsider teachers get to know the individuals they teach, they strive to establish a balance among their students—they adjust their approach according to their impressions of the dynamics around them to create a space in which all students feel valued, accommodated, and connected.

This emphasis on careful observation of group dynamics represents a lesson that all teachers might learn from. Winnie's self-description of pulling students "into the fold" represents the value she places on including those who might otherwise be passed over. Winnie uses her observational skills to identify and reach out to isolated students so that they know that they are seen and cared for.

Maria observes the complex power dynamics within her classroom and her school, and she quickly identifies and addresses areas of concern among members of the group. Students are aware of Maria's commitment to creating a space where everyone is respected, and they routinely seek out her confidence and advice.

Jamie establishes a safe space in his classroom early every school year, and he keeps an eye out to identify and intervene when problematic patterns emerge. Jamie models a classroom community where students' social and emotional needs are valued as a matter of course.

Implications for Scholarship

This book addresses an area less commonly represented in the educational research. It takes multiple identity characteristics into account to allow for a more authentic view of a teacher's experience. It examines the ways in which teachers navigate both their outsider and insider characteristics in order to connect with their students. Finally, it allows these stories to be told from the perspective of the teachers, placing them at the center of their own experiences.

In his examination of the relationship between emotion and identity, Michalinos Zembylas (2003) has posited that teacher identity is less a fixed or singular characteristic than one which "comes to be constituted through social interactions, performances, and daily negotiations within a school culture." As he looks at teacher identity characteristics among his research participants, he examines the norms embedded in school cultures and their diminishing influence on teacher emotion. Zembylas' work opens a door for multifaceted approaches to the study of teacher identities.

Implications for future scholarship include a greater emphasis on intersectionality theory in studies in the field of education. Scholars may apply this theory to many areas in the field: the study of classroom dynamics, collaborative relationships among teachers, lived experiences of administrators, and the development of education policy. Intersectionality allows for the possibility of examining these areas in a way that accommodates more of

their complex, sticky reality. Intersectionality also creates more possibilities for collaboration among oft-fragmented groups: LGBT education researchers, comparative education researchers, critical race education researchers, and researchers who look at disability within the context of education.

To approach intersectionality, traditional research methods sometimes fall short. It is with that understanding that I also offer a support for narrative inquiry. Intersectionality makes the call for a less contrived representation of people, while narrative inquiry represents a quest for a less contrived representation of reality. They are natural companions.

Representing the Whole Person: Intersectionality

McCall (2005) suggests that the goals of intersectionality theory are best served by research that allows for complexity in its methodology. Intersectionality as a theory resists reductionist approaches, and I made methodological choices throughout the study to honor this. I incorporated participants' words as the foundational element of the research, gathering their testimony through interviews, responses to shared pieces of literature, and writing. Through these avenues, I hoped to develop a perspective on each participant that would allow me to create representations that they would find accurate and substantive. Intersectionality motivated the choices that resulted in the transformative aspect of the research process. This emerged from the data gathering, writing, reading of shared literature, and member checking process, as well as the significant testimony that came from an empowering line of questioning. I engaged with participants around uncomfortable questions and sought their feedback throughout the data gathering and analysis processes.

The act of engaging with participants to challenge the fundamental terms of the study—the question of what being an outsider means and whether the term was a suitable one to use—brought a transactional movement to the act of posing and responding to interview questions. This allowed for shared exploration and coconstruction of knowledge.

Intersectionality informed the aspect of the study that placed participants in the position of self-definition. Rather than my assigning labels to them or attempting to fill "quotas" of representation, I placed the onus of self-identification on participants. Educational research has yet to fully embrace the perspective of intersectionality theory, although the theory represents the future of scholarship in many areas of social science research

(Yuval-Davis, 2006). In the early years of intersectionality scholarship, Grillo (1995) wrote:

> Each of us in the world sits at the intersection of many categories. [. . .] At any one moment in time and in space, some of these categories are central to [our] being and [our] ability to act in the world. Others matter not at all. Some categories, such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, are important most of the time. Others are rarely important. When something or someone highlights one of her categories and brings it to the fore, she may be a dominant person, an oppressor of others. Other times, even most of the time, she may be oppressed herself. (p. 17)

Research on teachers and schools has yet to take on such a complex reality; nevertheless, the classroom is a site where life's many truths and realities play out daily. Ongoing exchange of information occurs throughout its small space. The classroom is just the place to observe the intersections that make up individual identities and the larger identity of a society.

This study was conceived to examine multiple identity categories that emerge in an outsider teacher's classroom. It seeks to fill the gap left among previous studies that have treated identity characteristics as isolated entities—as if it were possible to only look at someone's eye without seeing the rest of the face. It is my hope that the study demonstrates the possibility inherent in engagement with a whole person rather than only the parts deemed worthy of a closer look.

Support for Narrative Inquiry

Scholar Robert Nash (2004) emphasizes the need for narrative as an "instructive" (p. 46) tool. He states that although many scholars reduce narrative inquiry to mere "journalism" (p. 49), they forget that a story is just as much about the writer as it is about what is written. To Nash, narrative represents as realistic a picture of our experience in the world as any scholarly work considered more empirical by traditional, academic standards, if not more so. "Our personal stories contain within them the germs of many intellectual and experiential truths. At the least, they become the means for conveying our wisdom. At the most, they can change lives" (p. 42).

Narrative inquiry anchors this study, giving participants and researcher the space for stories, reflection, contradiction, growth, and transformation.

Ideally, those who read it find in themselves some connection to the stories or learn something from the experience of another that they could not have learned otherwise.

The stories of outsider teachers contain important lessons for the education community: teachers, researchers, education students, and college of education faculties. In order for this wide group to learn most from the outsider teacher experience, the stories of that experience must be told in a compelling and thoughtful manner. The narrative methodology can be used to effectively convey stories from classrooms to a large and varied audience.

Reexamining the Term "Outsider Teacher"

Throughout the study, participants and I engaged with the term "outsider teacher," with varying degrees of conversation and debate, as I have outlined and described here. Because the term was central to this inquiry, I revisit it in this final chapter. The term remains a problematic one, though one I continue to find compelling. I cannot ignore my privileged position in all of this, in particular, my option of taking on the term to describe myself, rather than having it assigned to me. Perhaps more important to this inquiry than the term itself were the conversations it inspired. The open questioning and interaction with the term "outsider" represent values that I now consider critical to transformative research—research that empowers participants and encourages critical thought and engagement.

In addition to the use of the term "outsider" to describe the participants and myself, I now use it to describe my own presence within the group as a participant. I functioned as an "outsider participant" in this study. Because I had the power to tell their stories as well as my own, I made ongoing choices about what I would share and hide. Although I can claim that my membership in the group adds a share of legitimacy to my research, I also take on a share of power as the only member who reports out.

Throughout the process of the study, I have also engaged with self-definition. The "outsider" term was one that some participants and I gravitated toward more warmly than others, but one that compelled all of us to talk. I still feel a part of the group of participants in this study. As the dialogs and relationships deepened, some of us felt transformed by the process. I was likely the one who benefitted most from the opportunity for transformation.

The research allowed for growth through honesty, and I engaged in honest dialog with both participants and myself. By traveling with them to

uncomfortable places, at times, and by sharing painful parts of my own story, I explored the definition of outsiderness for myself. Outsiderness remains, for me, a definitive aspect of my own life, and of life in general.

School districts, students, and communities benefit from the presence of outsider teachers. The outsider teachers I describe here are outsiders according to the original definition in the study, as well as the "outsider thinkers" I have added to the many characteristics of the participants here. Students must learn to listen to many voices. They must see different types of individuals, with different backgrounds, perspectives, and identities at the front of their classrooms.

In the final narrative of this book, I describe an instance when I applied the lessons of this research. There may have been some overlap with my own early outsider teacher experience; however; this occasion demonstrated far more intentionality.

Final Narrative: Applying the Lessons Learned

I am teaching a graduate course in the master's program at a large public university. My research for this book has ended, and I have gathered the lessons from this group of outsider teachers. My course is a capstone in which students reflect on their year spent as classroom interns, and they consider how they might apply their experiences, along with the theory they have learned, to a philosophy of teaching as they commence their careers in education.

Practicing proactive inclusiveness: *The basic format of my course is rooted in proactive inclusiveness. Because my students are working in schools full time, as well as completing other coursework, raising children, and working additional jobs in many cases, I know that they are arriving at my evening class exhausted, having had minimal opportunities to complete course readings and writing assignments. At the beginning of each session, I provide short readings that can be completed on-the-spot, in person. As students enter the room, often bringing their dinners along, they can transition to the classroom learning environment as they read a thought-provoking piece, and they can spend a few moments writing their responses with the aid of a writing prompt to frame their thinking. The sessions begin quietly, as we prepare for our discussion of the night's topic.*

I provide many avenues and opportunities for students to communicate with me—in notes, via *e-mail or in our online classroom, on the phone, after class, anonymously, or not—which gives every member of the group a direct*

connection to me and a degree of influence over the direction of the course. Not everyone wants to share openly or in front of the group, so I ask students to weigh in early in the semester and again at about the halfway mark. Their first communication gives me a chance to learn about their concerns, sensitivities, identity characteristics I might not know about, and triggers, as well as their learning preferences, personalities, and backgrounds. Their communication with me midway through the course allows them to give me feedback on how we are doing, what is working, and what is not. I exercise proactive inclusiveness by showing that the needs and learning of all students are important.

***Leveraging insider characteristics**: The group I teach is mostly middle class, predominately white, and its members share my commitment to education for ourselves and our students. I have multiple insider characteristics to leverage here. When we discuss racism or other issues defined by societal inequity, I often introduce ideas that conflict with my students' worldviews, which are, in some cases, more conservative than mine. Many of our readings challenge beliefs in meritocracy or racial color-blindness as guiding principles. When oppositional perspectives emerge, I narrate my own experiences as a white, middle-class woman—a privileged person—learning about the experiences of those who face institutional oppression. In some cases, my students may see themselves in some of my stories—as they may see themselves in me—and hopefully, this connection opens them to new ways of looking at the world.*

Nearly all of us share some excitement about teaching, which gives me an insider characteristic that is well within reach. Knowing this, I try to model good teaching in my class—and I explain why I am making the decisions that I am—because I want this group to gain more than just theoretical points of reference. Within the context of our shared dialogue, I demonstrate behaviors, tactics, and approaches the students might try out in their classrooms, and I encourage them to practice their teaching on us at every opportunity.

***Recalling past experiences:** I look at the nervous faces in the class, and I see myself. This is the last course this group will complete before they begin teaching their own students for the first time. Their questions and concerns send me back to my first week of teaching, when I could hardly sleep, replaying each day's events obsessively. These memories remind me to be patient and empathic, and to reassure the group that they might stumble as novice teachers, but that each day presents an opportunity to begin again and to build on the lessons of the previous day.*

As I get to know my students, I encourage them to identify their strengths, and to determine how those strengths might serve them as classroom teachers.

My own strengths as an outsider quickly bubbled up when I began teaching, and they served me well as I tried to gain footing on new terrain. The same will hopefully be the case for these students.

Many of my students' questions—especially the very concrete or sensitive ones—remind me of experiences I have had. I share my experiences openly, knowing that they are most relevant in this setting, where the biggest question is often, "What do you wish you had known before you became a teacher?"

Observing the interplay of outsider/insider dynamics: *Although many insider characteristics are shared among members of this group, there is some age diversity in the room, most notably with two students who came into the master's program straight from their undergraduate program. They are significantly younger than their classmates, and they seem intimidated and a bit unplugged from discussions. Though I have been trying to pull them in, I have come up short. I can see that they are falling by the wayside, that they are allies for each other, but that they are not jumping into our shared dialogues with confidence. One night, our discussion gets underway, and it seems like suddenly everyone has a comment or idea to contribute, without enough time and space in the session to share it.*

At a pause in the conversation, I wonder aloud—How might we create more space for participation while we are in class? We talk about setting up a simultaneous platform for written comments and contributions while our verbal discourse takes place—somewhere for the quieter members of the group to contribute or for the "overflow" conversation to spill and be collected. I reach for some chart paper to stick on the wall, thinking that people can write their ideas and responses there, and a younger student motions me over.

The young man says, "Look, it's simple. We should just set up a Google doc and project it onto the screen in the front of the room. Then everyone can easily participate, and we can keep a record of the conversation. We can even continue it later. Even I will participate if we do that," he says, smiling. As I am puzzling through the mechanics of the idea, this outsider in the group moves quickly up to the front, starts up the projector, opens a public Google Drive document, and projects it onto the screen. Classmates grab their laptops, and those who aren't speaking begin typing away. Soon, the room comes alive with a multilevel conversation in which everyone can participate—and does—with enthusiasm. We are speaking together about the implications of a shared text, with questions being asked, answered, and challenged aloud and onscreen.

It's late, and we have all worked all day, but the room is buzzing.

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