

The Closing of the Classroom Space

Abstract

Adopting Clandinin and Connelly's (1992) image of teachers as curriculum makers as well as their ideas about in-classroom and out-of-classroom places on teachers' professional knowledge landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995), I draw on examples from my school-based research conducted in the fourth largest urban center in the U.S. to conceptualize and map how the classroom space where teachers and students actively live curriculum has been significantly reduced. Using meta-level narrative analysis, I traverse several research accounts that elucidate different manifestations of the closing of the classroom space in elementary school, middle school, and high school contexts. In the analysis, the ways that teachers, principals, parents, university professors, consultants, school districts, and the media contribute to the restrictive environment are explicated. Also, versions of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that accelerate the narrowing process are named. In the end result, changes to teachers' professional knowledge landscape from 1997-2007, the decade in which Texas's educational policies gave way to the U.S.'s No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), are characterized.

When I first moved from western Canada to the mid-southern United States in the late 1990s, I immediately was struck by how much more regulated the schools in the state of Texas were in comparison to the schools in the province of Alberta. For example, T. P. Yaeger, the middle school where I began my US-based inquiries, had as many employees monitoring student attendance on one campus as did the entire school district, the second largest one in Canada, in the city from which I hailed. At first brush, I attributed this and other pronounced regulatory differences to the fact that Canada did not have a marker educational event like the legally enforced desegregation of schools in the U.S. I also thought that the activities and presence of a strong unified teachers' union in Alberta versus several smaller organized groups in Texas¹ had been able to protect teachers' professionalism to a greater degree. Furthermore, the public education system in Alberta had not lost as many students to private schools and home schooling as had been the case in Texas, the urban center that would be my new home. Still, a classroom space existed in the US schools I observed at that time, albeit a smaller space to the one in which I was accustomed.

However, in conducting my fine-grained studies in elementary schools, middle schools and high schools peopled by mostly diverse, high poverty students since 1997, I have captured the incremental narrowing of the classroom space, an approach that closely parallels the high stakes achievement testing movement in Texas, and one that has been reinforced—some would argue completed (i.e. Amrein & Berliner, 2002)—through the federal adoption and implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002). To present

¹ The large teachers' union in the city where I work became broken into smaller organizations in the years preceding the forced desegregation of public schools. No one teacher association has the collective power to seriously challenge teachers' workplace conditions or their professional development.

this case, I engage in a narrative meta-level analysis traversing my existing research studies and offer some overarching observations. But before I begin the narrative analysis, readers need to know about my research program, the nature of my methodology, and the conceptual frame that underpins this inquiry.

My Research Program

To begin my research investigations in Texas, I negotiated entry into T. P. Yaeger Middle School, a campus that was enacting a “models of teaching” initiative. Very quickly, the focus of my research program shifting ever so slightly from the influence of context on what teachers know, the research niche I had established in Canada, to the influence of school reform on what teachers know. As I explained elsewhere, this happened because “the topic of the influence of school reform slide onto my research agenda in much the same fashion as the idea of organized school reform crept into the [local] educators’ lives” (Craig, 2003, p. 4). Then, later in 1997, another major national reform movement set up office in the mid-southern city where I work, and T. P. Yaeger was chosen as one of the eleven lead campuses involved in that five-year effort (1997-2002). Not only did the faculty of Yaeger invite me to conduct research alongside them, so did the faculties of four other campuses who also were lead schools in that reform endeavor: Heights Community Learning Center, Cochrane Academy, Hardy Academy, and Eagle High School. Heights belonged to the same school jurisdiction as Yaeger whereas Cochrane, Hardy and Eagle were situated in an adjacent school district in the urban core. Furthermore, I was chosen to serve as the summative evaluator for a sixth lead campus, Destiny High School, which was located in a nearby suburban school district whose community later became annexed to the city. Toward the end of the major

reform initiative, Cochrane Academy additionally received a three-year grant funded by the federal government, an award that stretched to 2005 due to a no cost extension and 2006 with respect to its No Child Left Behind reporting. In this initiative, I served as Cochrane's evaluator but also Hamilton Academy's evaluator because Hamilton became the new arts-based campus that was added, through the will of the school district and the generosity of the federal grant program, to Cochrane's feeder pattern of magnet schools.

More recently, I began to work collaboratively with three new campuses: Armitage Elementary (K-4), Renaissance Academy (K-5), and Hawthorne Middle School, all of which are located in the same school jurisdiction as Cochrane, Hardy, and Eagle. In addition, I have continued my long term relationships with the educators teaching at the campuses already mentioned. Some of these ongoing associations are directly funded (Cochrane, Heights, Yaeger); others are not (Hardy, Eagle). At the same time, readers need to know that a dimension of my research with the Hardy and Eagle teachers (as well as several other educators) is supported by a teacher research grant held by the reform movement outside of schools and universities with review board approval provided by my institution.

Taken together, my research program at Yaeger has spanned more than a decade, my inquiries at Cochrane, Hardy, Heights and Eagle have occurred over close to a ten-year period, my association with Destiny involved one-year of intensive field work, my collaboration with Hamilton has taken place over a year and one-half period, my work with Armitage has unfurled over two and one-half years, and my inquiries with Renaissance and Hawthorne have involved about one and one-half years of study. Over a cumulative ten-year period, then, I have been closely involved with educators on ten

campuses situated in three school districts in Texas: 2 high schools, 3 middle schools, 2 intermediate schools, and 3 elementary schools, all of which are located in close proximity to one another in Houston, the fourth most diverse, urban center in the US.²

Research Method

In my research program, I employ narrative inquiry as both the method and form of my longitudinal investigations (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narrative inquiry unfolds in a three dimensional space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), which, following Dewey (1938), includes the temporal (past-present-future), the personal and the social (interaction), and the contextual (situation and place). This three-dimensional space enables me to “characterize schools without dismissing teachers’ and principals’ knowledge and the centrality of their relationships and interactions to the flow of events in the educational enterprise” (Craig, 2003, p. 11). As such, narrative inquiry is a fluid (Schwab, 1962; Connelly & Clandinin, 2005) research method, one that is a complex approach to live and an even more difficult one to describe (Clandinin, J. Huber, M. Huber, Murphy, Murray Orr, Pearce, Steeves, 2006; Olson, 2000a).

The inquiry I share here is further complicated by the fact that it involves meta-level narrative analysis. This means I mesh together several individuals’ experiences, schools, and situations to examine the manner in which the classroom space has been narrowed over the past decade in the Texas schools in which I conduct my narrative inquiries. The approach I take broadly follows work previously conducted by Czarniawka (1997), Connelly and Clandinin (1999), Craig (2002), and Olson and Craig (2005). In her work, Czarniawka combined a number of narratives to portray a meta-level view of institutional

² Broad brushstroke descriptions of the campus’s stories of school (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) are available in Appendix 1.

identity, whereas Connelly and Clandinin, in their research, connected different stories by different authors to order to capture the many ways teachers form their identities. Meanwhile, in a 2002 essay, I surveyed how various expressions of the conduit manifested themselves in my research studies, and in a 2005 article, Olson and I examined how the cover story conceptualization emerged in our related research programs. As can be seen, different narrative researchers have used meta-level narrative analysis for different purposes.

This particular inquiry most closely follows the Craig (2002) and Olson and Craig (2005) exemplars (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002) because focus is placed on a narrative phenomenon that fell within the parameters of my personal research studies. In this work, I string together narratives found in my existing scholarship as well as some “stitched together, second hand stories” (Clandinin et al, 2006, p. 96) whose plotlines “floated at the margins” (Olson, 2000b, p. 350) of my research investigations. In addition, I draw on field texts that have yet to appear in print. In all instances, the passage of time, along with increased interactions with more teachers in different school contexts, adds further heft to the “closing of the classroom space” theme around which this paper coheres.

Conceptual Backdrop

This research finds its roots in the scholarship of Dewey, Schwab, Jackson and, more recently, Connelly and Clandinin. Dewey (1908/1981) was the first to refer to teachers as moved by “their own intelligences and ideas” (p. 16), Schwab (1954/1978) envisioned teachers as “agent[s] of education, not of subject matter” (p. 128), and Jackson (1968) sought to understand classroom life not through others’ moral admonitions, but in teachers’ and students’ own terms. Schwab and Jackson additionally pulled on “*their own*

(italics in original) teaching as a basis for their ideas about teaching” rather than on “images of research” as others were doing (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 380). Meanwhile, Connelly and Clandinin (1988; Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Clandinin & Connelly, 1998) built on aspects of both Tyler’s (1949) and Schwab’s (1969, 1971, 1973, 1983) scholarship to persuasively argue that, rather than being implementers of others’ reform proposals, teachers are curriculum makers who pay attention to a broad range of sources, not the least of which is their own sensibilities informed by their students’ perceived needs and interests. From this perspective, “teachers and students live out a curriculum [in which] an account of teachers’ and students’ lives over time is the curriculum, although intentionality, objectives, and curriculum materials do play a part” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 365).

When Connelly and Clandinin first began their collaborative inquiries, they paid exclusive attention to Schwab’s teacher commonplace. This led them to conceptualize the idea of teachers’ personal practical knowledge, which they described as “that body of convictions and meanings, conscious and unconscious, that have arisen from experience (intimate, social, and tradition) and that are expressed in a person’s practices” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 7). However, as their research studies progressed, they increasingly paid attention to Schwab’s milieu commonplace, which they conceived as a professional knowledge landscape. For them,

...a landscape metaphor...allows [for] talk about space, place, and time. Furthermore, it has a sense of expansiveness and the possibility of being filled with diverse people, things and events in different relationships.... Because...the professional knowledge landscape as composed of relationships among people, places

and things,...it [is] both an intellectual and moral landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 4-5).

Clandinin and Connelly (1995) additionally introduced other narrative terms to the professional knowledge landscape conceptualization to capture the notion of teachers' knowledge shaping and being shaped in context. Of particular significance to this essay are their ideas relating to in-classroom and out-of-classroom places.

In previous work, I outlined the differences between Clandinin and Connelly's notions of in-classroom and out-of-classroom places in the following way:

One [the in-classroom space] is the relational world inside [their] classroom[s] where [teachers] co-construct meaning with [their] students. The other [the out-of-classroom place] is the abstract world where [teachers] live with everyone outside [their] classroom[s], a world where [they] meet all the other aspects of the educational enterprise such as the philosophies, the techniques, the materials, and the expectations that [they] will enact certain educational practices. While each of these places is distinctive, neither is totally self-contained (Craig, 1995, p. 16).

Stated differently, in-classroom places are interpersonal places where teachers experience a measure of moral and intellectual autonomy in their interactions with students. By way of contrast, out-of-classroom places are filled with others' prescriptions and desires. However, in the end result, neither of these places is exclusive. Rather, they co-exist, with both people and imperatives flowing across the boundaries, creating tensions in teachers' personal and professional lives.

In this particular paper, when I use the expression, the classroom space, I am conceiving of opportunities for teachers and students to meet face-to-face around matters

of curriculum within the in-classroom place on the professional knowledge landscape of schools. Like the three dimensional narrative inquiry space introduced earlier, the classroom space to which I am referring is temporal, dependent on human interactions, and context-bound. Within that space, teachers and students encounter openings where they can mutually make curriculum, openings they must seize of their own volition. At the same time, I recognize that moral directives originating in out-of-classroom places freely travel through the conduit (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Craig, 2002) and infringe on in-classroom places shared by teachers and students in subtle and not-so-subtle ways as my forthcoming meta-level narrative analysis will show.

Having mapped the conceptual frame of this paper, I am ready to slow down several epiphanic moments—transitional moments (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 82) I have held onto throughout the course of my narrative research program. My intent is to crystallize how I have witnessed the classroom place being increasingly closed. Through laying particular moments from different narrative inquiries alongside each other in a meta-level way, the reduction of teachers' and students' opportunities for curriculum making in in-classroom places will be revealed.

Moments of Narrowing Over Time and Across Context

The narrowing of the classroom space first became a recognizable phenomenon on T. P. Yaeger Middle School's professional knowledge landscape in 1998-1999 and known to me through the Yaeger teachers' experiences. T. P. Yaeger, as I earlier explained, participated in a national reform initiative that was awarded to the state educational agency and whose funds were distributed to participating schools through their respective school districts. The agency, in turn, designated a trainer to prepare 12 Yaeger teachers in

the “models of teaching” approach. The number of participants was subsequently upped to 20 teachers, and, shortly afterwards, the preparation of Yaeger’s 85 member faculty by their 20 teacher peers was expected. Not only did the imposed strategy of “teachers training teachers” prove to be problematic, the Yaeger faculty began to question the rationale for learning the teaching models devoid of subject matter as well as knowledge of their students and school milieu, commonplaces Schwab (1969) considered essential for curriculum making. Furthermore, not only were the teachers expected to make the purist models part of their instructional repertoires, the particular story of reform also dictated that they write lesson plans for other teachers’ consumption. Moreover, in the sessions, the trainer repeatedly underlined that the models were to be used “cleanly, not creatively.” Soon, the Yaeger teachers realized that the “models of teaching” reform not only stifled their creativity but intentionally infringed on their in-classroom places where they and their students actively co-created curriculum. They regretted that “[they had] skipped over a big concept, teacher knowledge” (Craig, 2001, p. 317) and spoke of having to “forc[e] the idea of relationships on students rather than allowing the notion to arise from them” (Craig, 2001, p. 316). And some teachers went as far as to say that they had become “slaves to forced generalizations...and slaves to a mandated curriculum process” (Craig, 2001, p. 315).

In addition to the prescribed models and the required writing of lesson plans and units for state distribution, the teachers’ performances were evaluated by a state educational agency representative who was the individual who designed the reform program, accompanied by a consultant from a university in another state. These individuals visited the Yager teachers’ classrooms for a short time, expecting that lessons

would unfold according to the predetermined teaching models. These lessons were then debriefed with the teachers in a less-than-sensitive manner—with Yaeger’s principal, their evaluator, present. This practice also raised issues, as the teachers’ conversation below suggests:

Charles: The lesson models are moving in the opposite direction to teacher empowerment. They are so prescribed that they take away from empowerment.

Colleague: I am wondering about the feedback from the reform representatives. My students are asking about what the people in suits had to say about their learning. They are really wondering—as I am—about the world of grownups—

Charles: This year is such a mixed bag—Imagine coming in in the middle of two class periods and making judgments [about teachers’ practices]...

Later:

Charles: There is this mirroring thing here that is not collaborative. It means doing what the expert does. It does not give individuals credit for their own smarts...

Daryl: It is scare tactics.

Charles: I resent having to play this game. People cannot be worked with like they, and their knowledge and experience, are interchangeable parts (Craig, 2001, p. 321).

In this way, the first narrowing of the classroom space emanating from outside forces surfaced at T. P. Yaeger Middle School in 1998. I now continue with a second example of narrowing, also on Yaeger's professional knowledge landscape, but a bit later in 1999.

While participating in the "models of teaching" reform movement that I have already outlined, T. P. Yaeger Middle School was additionally selected to be a lead campus in another major national reform movement that was setting up local offices in several urban sites, including the city where I worked. This second reform movement involved a substantial amount of funding spread over a five-year period, with the award flowing directly to the schools. With the first reform movement that had been introduced, Yaeger's principal, Brianne Larson, had come to the conclusion that:

...there were actually no choices. They said that the reform schools [would] go through training that [would] be interdisciplinary...the goal was to produce interdisciplinary units that would support the reform's principles. I think there is so much more to [reform] than that...I don't want to be critical...It is just that I see far more successes happening [elsewhere]... (Craig, 2002, p. 214).

Believing that her campus would be more autonomous in the second reform effort, Larson welcomed the opportunity for T. P. Yaeger to participate. Shortly thereafter, she discovered that her 1500-student urban campus received a \$150,000 award per year at the same time as Destiny High School, a suburban high school with less than 200 hand-selected students, received an annual award of \$200,000, which raised equity and excellence issues for her. Furthermore, as with the Middle Years reform effort discussed before, the locally interpreted national reform movement began to rain its own set of mandates on Yaeger, its teachers, and her. Additionally, Brianne was required to be in

out-of-school places—at the reform movement’s request—on more occasions than she considered reasonable. This also disturbed her because she understood her moral prerogative was to be in in-school and in-classroom places on Yaeger’s professional knowledge landscape and available to students, parents, and teachers. Furthermore, despite Yaeger’s awarded plan, Brianne and the reform movement representatives had differences of opinion concerning how Yaeger’s award would be spent. While the awarded proposal was meant to aid Yaeger in its transition to a professional development plot line, she found herself “go[ing] into the school every day not knowing if we will have the [professional development] focus or not...” She continued: “That [was] the frustrating part—it is like we are trying to change the school and yet it seems like the people who are there to help us change...are now...reverting to...methods much like a school district operates...” (Craig, 2002, p. 214). Not long afterwards, Brianne Larson voiced her ongoing frustration with “being on the short end of the stick” and shortly after that, she retired. At this juncture, both the in-classroom and in-school places on Yaeger’s professional knowledge landscape narrowed because the campus lost an experienced principal who respected the intellectual and moral autonomy of teachers and trusted what they would accomplish with children in in-classroom places.

In a manner somewhat like Yaeger, Hardy Academy, a historical African American school that remained under a federal court order for failure to desegregate properly at the time, also had two reform efforts underway. But different from Yaeger, Hardy had a second reform movement that focused on the writing of science curriculum in support of its science magnet theme. However, Hardy’s units of study were to be focused on the interests of the particular business sponsor, and other subject areas were to project a

similar point of view as the project progressed. The corporate donors were forthright in their purposes: they wanted to increase the potential pool of employees available to their industry and to serve the community. Once the underlying motives of the science initiative became known and university representatives holding the business-funded grant began to interact in the school milieu, the school faculty—not the community members—became “grievously agitated” about “not being asked, but being told, to participate,” “mandatory Saturday sessions,” a focus on literal, “not figurative or abstract,” integrated lesson plans, and “the writing of dictated curriculum”... (Craig, 2003, p. 62). In addition, moral and ethical questions about whether schools—magnet campuses or otherwise—should be engaged in preparing students as “pools of potential employees” for specific enterprises also privately were raised. An associated issue had to do with teacher scholarship and whether the curriculum document, once prepared, would be sold for profit (Craig, 2003, p. 62).

The issues at Hardy, it seems, ran the full gamut and even included the fear that the historical African American campus would have its name changed on the school marquee to reflect its corporate sponsor. In this way, the Hardy teachers came to know how curricula reflecting singular points of view could unduly shape classroom spaces; indeed, could begin to take over a school context—as the following conversation among some Hardy faculty members suggests:

Anna: We have competing grants here...

Marla: Actually, dueling grants...

Kaye: (Hums theme from *Dueling Banjos*)

Anna: And some of us, like Kaye, are heavily involved in different aspects of both [stories of reform]...

Genieve: And can see different underlying principles as to how people are worked with And the respect given teachers and their knowledge...

Kaye: [Referring to the industry-based science effort] Do you treat people well by bleeding them dry like turnips?

Genieve: Well, the differences are not surprising... [One] is a huge philanthropic endeavor founded on high ideals; the other has corporate sponsors.

Anna: The industry-based science effort is not philanthropic [in the same sense].

Kay: It is looking for workers [for the particular industry].

Genieve: It is founded on the principles on which Wall Street is founded.

Marla: Repeats *Dueling Banjos* theme (with personally crafted lyrics added to fit the tune)... “We need more money...let’s go check out the schools” (Craig, 2003, p. 72-73).

In the meantime, at Eagle High School, a campus located in the same school district as Hardy, two restrictive practices occurred in 1999-2000: one was longstanding (and shared by many other campuses); the other was a new iteration that also contributed to the closing of the classroom space. The first was district-sponsored training sessions required of all teachers whether they were new-to-career, new-to-school district, or experienced, and regardless of whether they taught elementary, middle school, or high school students. While the teachers had some input into the nature of their professional development on the Eagle campus, the same teachers had no voice whatsoever where district staff development was concerned. They were required to attend what they termed

“one-size-fits-all” training sessions, which one teacher characterized as “...scripted, you know. They give you this and you will say ‘blank, blank, blank’...Everybody does the same thing” (Olson & Craig, 2005, p. 168). According to the teacher, this method was meant to ensure that all teachers employing the same strategies with respect to improving standardized test scores or teaching underserved African American males. However, the problem was that prescribed topics such as these play out in particularistic ways in teachers’ classroom milieus. Hence, when a beginning teacher questioned the relevance of the district-wide approach by asking “What is the point? I don’t get it...,” an experienced colleague responded: “I get a chance to see friends from other schools...We talk and have a good time...but we realize it is pointless” (Olson & Craig, 2005, p. 168). Here, readers see teachers’ out-of-school learning opportunities impacted by the “rhetoric of conclusions” (Schwab, 1962) systematically being poured into the conduit by the school district in question. This, in turn, affected the classroom space because teachers were denied opportunities to think hard with their colleagues about the challenges they routinely experience with particular learners in their in-classroom places.

As foreshadowed, Eagle also had a second closing of the classroom space underway. Like Brianne Larson, the principal of T. P. Yaeger, Henry Richards, the principal of Eagle High School, was known for the respect he accorded teachers’ agency and pedagogical practices. As one Eagle teacher worded it,

Henry totally trusted in the professionalism of ...teachers. He had faith in us. He would never make us do anything perfunctory. He saw us as possessing a very special knowledge of curriculum...Henry put a circle of protection around us so we could work with students (Craig, 2004, p. 1238).

However, when Eagle's test scores dipped in a statistically insignificant manner, the school district superintendent did not consider Eagle's acceptance of 140 "at risk" African American males who would have otherwise been dropouts, the fact the school's population had spiked to 3000+ students in the previous year when a 9th grade campus was built, or the possibility of an implementation dip (Fullan, 2001). Instead, the reform program that gave teachers additional voice and agency in school programming and in shaping the tenor of the school milieu was deemed to be the culprit. As a result, Henry Richards was informed that "a very prescriptive way [was] coming down the tubes... [with] parameters well-defined..." (Craig, 2004, p. 1249). After the superintendent's flight backward to "old and familiar" ways (Schwab, 1969, p. 28), Henry Richards embarked on a flight of a different kind: to a principalship in the suburbs. With Henry's "circle of protection" removed, the teachers found "the things we were required to do...was like being visited by the plague" (Craig, 2004, p. 1252). They claimed their practices were placed "under siege" as they became forced to teach mandatory phonics, use worksheets, follow scripted lesson plans, attend compulsory training sessions, and became subjected to mandatory classroom visits where the slowing down of instruction in all English courses, for example, was demanded of everyone (Craig, 2004, p. 1252). Through the loss of a school leader who protected teachers' and students' curriculum making as part of his administrative practice, the classroom spaces at Eagle significantly narrowed, especially during the transition period.

Meanwhile, a few miles away, Heights Community Learning Center, another lead campus participating in the same reform movement as Yaeger, Eagle, and Hardy, was enacting a promising dual language program. Studied longitudinally by local researchers,

the positive results of its English/Spanish instructional delivery model had not yet been released. About the same time, Spanish as a language of instruction was under assault, particularly in the states of Arizona and California. Hence, when the Texas media picked up on the national debate and declared that Hispanic-speaking students should be instructed in English only, Heights's parents immediately became concerned about the wisdom and value of the dual language program in which their children were thriving. As a result, Heights's teachers fielded an unprecedented number of parent inquiries during the media blitz. In this way, the media, vulnerable parents, and researchers somewhat tardy in reporting results came together to constrain on classroom spaces, particularly those available to language minority/racial minority children.

Cochrane Academy, a grade 4-5 school for the mathematics, sciences and fine arts, also participated in the same national reform movement as the schools already introduced. Toward the conclusion of that award (2000), Cochrane became the recipient of a federal grant to support instruction in art as a core content area and arts as integration on the school's professional knowledge landscape. Unfortunately, Cochrane Academy's leadership changed and the new principal the school district selected for Cochrane was "test score driven." To that principal's way of thinking, "if the arts were to assume any role in the school program, it would be to provide, in her words, 'interesting activities—fluff' to offset hard-nosed instruction in tested subject areas [language arts and mathematics in particular]" (Craig, 2006, p. 273). This, in turn, prompted some of Cochrane's teachers to conclude that "there is something cold about what is being done here...the way children are being manipulated, the way art is being controlled, the use of art for testing purposes" (Craig, 2006, p. 285). Not only were certain Cochrane teachers

upset by this realization, they recognized they could not continue to exist in a “survival” mode. Thus, some chose to leave Cochrane Academy for school contexts within which they could grow “all the best colors in a garden” (Craig, 2006, p. 286) in classroom spaces they would cultivate with future students.

Returning to T. P. Yaeger Middle School once again, other examples of classroom spaces becoming more restrictive occurred from 2004 onward. Originally a lead campus in the 5-year reform movement, Yaeger was selected to receive continued funding at a substantially reduced rate from its former sponsor. Yaeger chose to use the bulk of the funding to introduce a readers’ and writers’ workshop approach to literacy instruction to the school’s professional knowledge landscape primarily through the introduction of a consultant steeped in the method. When the literacy trainer was in town, she would visit teachers’ classrooms and openly critique their lessons in front of their students, peers, and administrators, all three of whom (the principal and two assistant principals) were the teachers’ evaluators. One well-respected teacher, for example, was informed in front of students, teacher peers, and his principal/evaluator that his class was “the worst GT [gifted and talented] class” the trainer had ever observed. Directed at both teachers and students, comments such as this “cut to the bone,” as one authority figure worded it. At the same time as this “invasion” of the classroom space was going on, the Yaeger teachers found their professional development sessions increasingly dedicated to assessment and evaluation. Furthermore, interim report cards—requiring quantitative scores in each core content area—were circulated electronically to parents as often as every 3.5 weeks. Here, we see teaching, staff development, and reporting practices all burdening the classroom place where teaching and learning occurs.

In 2005, at Armitage Elementary, one of the new campuses with which I began to work, a magnet story of school formed the campus's inaugural narrative. At the same time, test preparation exercises existed as part of the school routine during the time typically reserved for "show and tell," classroom circles, or opening exchanges between primary teachers and students. Without opportunities to engage in personal conversations with individual class members, the Armitage teachers began to miss vital information concerning the children's lives. For example, in the case of one third-grader, it was not until a "trail of roaches emerged from his knapsack" that the teachers realized that he had been in the care of a minor for a 2-week period. The teachers surmised that, had they had time to enter into discussions with their students, it would not have taken an army of ants devouring contaminated food to draw the problematic situation to their attention and for them to put district policies and procedures into effect. Additionally, the Armitage teachers regretted that they had been disturbed by the young man's lateness during the early morning test preparation exercises, when in fact they should have been "congratulating" and "applauding the young person for getting himself to school" without adult supervision.

In the meantime, at Hamilton Academy, the new arts-based campus introduced to the feeder pattern of schools to which Cochrane Academy, a school discussed earlier, belonged, there was a teacher who Yaeger's principal and his spouse, also an administrator, would hire in a "New York minute." In fact, after seeing Cameron Day involved in "tough mathematical problem solving" with the African American boys on his basketball team, the two principal from the neighboring school district "signed [their] son up for Cameron's team" (Olson & Craig, 2006). However, while others greatly

admired and complimented Cameron on his teaching, he did not receive similar recognition from his administration at Hamilton nor previously at Cochrane. Cameron observed:

That's one of my greatest frustrations. I have so much stuff going on in my classroom and I cannot get an administrator to come in here to see it. There is always some excuse, some meeting going on...In fact, most of my students did not even know who the principal was until the middle of last year (Olson & Craig, 2006).

It seems the administrators in Cameron's school district were so caught up with the enforcement of policy and deficit thinking that they had no time to listen to what was going well with teachers and children in the spaces they had carved in their in-classroom places. In the end, Cameron Day—like the Cochrane teachers previously mentioned—sought to leave Hamilton—not because of his high needs students or the nature of the urban context—but because there was “no space for his small stories of success to be [shared] amid the mega narratives of accountability” (Olson & Craig, 2006) privileged on his campus and by his school district.

In this final example, I focus on Hawthorne Middle School and Renaissance Academy, two of my more recent research sites. Both of these campuses were subjected to quality management reviews undertaken by “examiners” from other district campuses and their partners, and led by a business consultant who was a former employee of a Fortune 500 Company. The consultant frequently assured the principals, teachers and their community advocates that they were on “friendly territory.” However, when the review processes began, the educators found that their knowledge and experiences were marginalized unless their data was presented in the form dictated by the quality

management firm. Never mind that Hawthorne Middle School's 86% underserved students and 40% mobility rate, along with 100 underserved students from New Orleans, were commonplace understandings among the teachers and administrators. Never mind that faculty understood that the median income of Renaissance Academy families was \$14,000 or less. And never mind that the dual language program at Renaissance's review school programmatically allowed teachers and students to communicate in Spanish in the morning. Unless every tidbit of information was spelled out in great detail in the campuses's data presentations, the complex realities the teachers and students daily lived—as judged by the quality management team (composed in part by their coerced peers and community partners)—did not exist. Hence, through systematic disregard of teachers' personal practical knowledge, classroom and school spaces became narrowed as quantitative data—not generative stories of experience—became mandated as “the way” to “open” every team meeting, every faculty meeting, and every lesson students were taught.

Reflective Conclusion

In this essay, I have threaded together a number of transitional moments that occurred over time and across context in which the classroom space where teachers and students actively make curriculum narrowed. This closing of the classroom space occurred through a multitude of means and involved a variety of actors ranging from principals and superintendents to district personnel and private consultants, and university researchers and evaluators to teachers' colleagues and teachers themselves. In different ways, each contributed to how the in-classroom space became increasingly controlled

over the past decade, the period of time when the No Child Left Behind Act was formulated in the state of Texas and spread throughout the nation.

In my meta-level narrative analysis, it became readily apparent that the narrowing was precipitated by individuals who had the authority to enter into school situations “to dictate...what the... good shall be” (Dewey, 1916, p. 121). Whether we refer to this “unwitting mask of...benevolent interest in others” (Dewey, 1916, p. 121) as “malefic generosity” (Greene, 1978, p. 100), “arrogant perception” (Lugones, 1987, p. 4) or “arrogance of reason” (Sack, 1997, p. 6), the point is that opportunities where others in out-of-classroom and out-of-school places could have freed teachers and students “so they may seek and find the good of their own choice” (Dewey, 1916, p. 121) were not taken advantage of. This set the stage for the in-classroom place “constrain[ing]...not only...actions [but] also...content and extent of...awareness...” (Sack, 1997, p. 17) as can particularly been seen in the Yaeger, Heights, Armitage, Renaissance and Hawthorne exemplars. In the aforementioned situations, teachers and students necessarily had to acquiesce to others’ determinations of their “best interests,” with the others being trainers, district consultants, evaluators, principals, and the media in the meta-level story I pieced together.

But the problem ran deeper than that, as my meta-level narrative analysis also showed. It additionally had to do with how teachers (and, by association, principals) understood their pedagogical practices. In Schwab’s words, teachers

...want something more for... students than the capacity to give back...a report of what...has [been] said. [Teachers] wants [students] to possess a knowledge or a skill in the same way that [the teacher] possesses it, as a part of [the teacher’s] best-loved

self... [The teacher's] controlled and conscious purpose is to liberate, not captivate the student (Schwab, 1954/1978, p. 124-125).

Thus, when teachers found that their efforts to academically liberate students were thwarted by others' interventions, faculty members at Cochrane and Hamilton, for example, vacated their positions and became teacher turnover/retention statistics at the same time as their school districts lamented the ongoing teacher shortage and the lack of availability of qualified teaching personnel. In a similar way, districts lost highly experienced principals such as Yaeger's Brianne Lawson and Eagle's Henry Richards through dictating to them how their schools should be led and eventually severed their relationships with teachers and students as these principals also added to the turnover/retention rate in the metropolitan Houston area.

Then, there was the most ominous development: teachers weighed down with others' prescriptions meeting face-to-face in the classroom space with students who were all-too-knowing of the pressures foisted on their young shoulders. How contrary this situation is to the teaching-learning situation Schwab described:

There must be no demand upon the child other than participation, no insistence on right methods or standards which would change the child's view of its incompleteness from capacity for growth to mere incompetence... work cannot, by the farthest stretch of the word, be called willing when it is done perforce under the whip of an imminent inquisition (Schwab, 1954/1978, p. 119-121).

Here, we peel back yet another layer of the dilemma and approach the core of the matter: the student's view of herself/himself as a learner is what is at stake in any discussion of the classroom space. When force is used by teachers in the learning situation and/or force

is parachuted in from out-of-classroom places (family, school, society), the student no longer feels invited into the learning process nor willfully gives herself/himself over to it. Instead, the learner's sense of self is in danger of devolving from a view of self as one capable of growth to a view of self as completely incompetent. The Cochrane teacher who spoke of "something cold...being done here...the way children are... manipulated, the way art is...controlled..., the use of art for testing purposes" most certainly understood this risk. The Yaeger teacher whose students were described as "the worst GT class" the school's literacy trainer had ever seen also was aware of this peril as were the Hardy teachers who riled against students being considered as "pools of potential employees" and teachers "being bled dry like turnips."

As can be seen, the solution leading up to and arising from the No Child Left Behind Act—the increased control of the classroom space—has created "mutual frustrations" and "canceling out" (Schwab, 1969, p. 27) of intentions. Much energy has been expended and a great "incapacity to arrive at solutions" (Schwab, 1969, p. 27) has resulted. At the same time, amplified accounts portraying the happenings and goings on of "real acts, real teachers, [and] real children" (Schwab, 1969, p. 35) have been produced which show concern not only for "successes and failures... as measured in test situations but also as evidenced in life and work" (Schwab, 1969, p. 39).

To end, I turn the topic of the closing of the classroom space on its head. I query: How could the space be opened up—that is, become less burdened by mandates and imperatives? Unfortunately, I have no pat answers to offer. But I am aware of two minor developments. At the national level, it appears that the government-sponsored scripted reading and mathematics programs have bumped up against the federally-funded

innovative programs introduced to the same school contexts. The recognition of this crowding and jostling for position—even between different grant programs sponsored by the same federal agency—represents somewhat of a beginning for the federal unraveling of the classroom space dilemma. And locally, I have found that positions concerning what constitutes data appear to not be as hardened as presumed. A case in point is the business management consultant who worked with Renaissance and Hawthorne and who praised the Eagle teachers (who were not in attendance) for reflectively writing about their in-classroom experiences with students. Here, a modicum of recognition was afforded educators who sought to make the complexities of their teaching situations public.

While neither of these examples constitute earth-shattering advances, they do suggest cracks in what otherwise has seemed an impermeable surface. In addition to moments such as these, which appear from time to time, members of the educational enterprise need to be wakeful to opportunities where they can assist with the opening of the classroom space because, as Jackson (1968/1990) explains, “...learning how to see things differently...inside classrooms..., makes a great deal of difference in how we respond.... Waking to a fresh view of things invariably alters the way we think and subsequently act” (p. xvii). Such a stance is “befitting of a free people” (Cremin, 1990, p. 96). Such a focus is deserving of relentless attention.

Appendix 1

School District 1

T. P. Yaeger Middle School is located in one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in America. A school with a gifted and talented program serving 1000 student admitted by application and a regular program for 500 neighborhood students, it is attended by more than one-third White and Asian students, slightly less than one-third African American students, and slightly less than one-third Mexican American and Hispanic immigrant students. A court order previously regulated the racial makeup of the campus but that ruling more recently been overturned. In the early 2000s, Yaeger received a state award for the manner in which it had addressed the achievement gap of its underserved students. Yaeger is currently a recognized campus in the state of Texas.

Heights Community Learning Center is situated in a previously White neighborhood near the urban core. Currently peopled by predominantly Mexican American and Hispanic immigrant families, it offers a dual language approach to teaching and learning supported by a close partnership with a local university. Most recently, Heights holds the distinction of being named an International Spanish Academy. Heights's community is in major transition with many of its older homes being torn down or replaced with new ones whose architecture mirrors that of the historical neighborhood. Heights Community Learning Center is currently a recognized campus in the state of Texas.

School District 2

Cochrane Academy is a magnet school for the mathematics, sciences, and fine and performing arts. Situated in one of the largest and most historical African American

neighborhoods in the nation, Cochrane's school district recently resolved its long-standing failure to desegregate properly court order. Like Yaeger, Cochrane was bestowed with a special honor from the state in the 2000s for the manner in which it had reduced the achievement gap for underserved and minority students. Cochrane is considered one of the leading arts-based education campuses in the nation. Within Texas, it is a recognized campus.

Hardy Academy is a magnet school for the mathematics, sciences, and fine and performing arts, which is located in the same feeder pattern—in fact, around the block—from Cochrane. Hardy's narrative differs from that of Cochrane in that the campus was used to educate the most behavior challenged students in the school district in the early desegregation years preceding the federal court order. Most recently, the feeder pattern to which Cochrane and Hardy belong was expanded through shifting the grade levels offered by each school and introducing a new academy, Hamilton Academy (described later). Hardy is a recognized campus in the state of Texas.

Eagle High School, a campus attended by over two thousand students, has undergone one of the most dramatic shifts in campus composition of any school in America. Once attended by 80 percent white students, it has now more than inverted its white/minority student ratio. A large comprehensive high school with a well known football team, it is in the process of introducing an International Baccalaureate program to its regular course offerings. A portion of Hardy Academy's students choose to attend Eagle; also, all of the students who attend **Hawthorne Middle School** are zoned to Eagle. Eagle is a recognized campus in the state of Texas.

Hamilton Academy is the new school that was introduced to Cochrane and Hardy's feeder pattern of arts-based schools. When the transition happened in the third year of the federally funded arts grant, Cochrane became a grade 3-4 campus, Hamilton became a grade 5-6 school, and Hardy began to serve grade 7-8 students. Prior to that, Cochrane had been attended by grade 4-5 students and Hardy had been attended by grades 6-8 students. Already, Hamilton has garnered major awards from the state for how its students perform in reading and mathematics as well as a number of magnet school honors. From its inception, Hamilton has been a recognized school in the state of Texas.

Armitage Elementary is located in close proximity to Eagle High School. A new campus with several teachers on faculty who gravitated to it from Cochrane Academy, Armitage opened with an international plotline and an arts-based approach to learning. Armitage Elementary is a recognized campus in the state of Texas.

Renaissance Academy is located in an industrial area near the airport. Formed around an engineering magnet theme, it serves mostly Mexican American, Hispanic immigrant, and African American students. The school is greatly respected by its community members and partners. Renaissance holds many magnet honors and is a recognized campus in the state of Texas.

Hawthorne Middle School, as indicated earlier, feeds into Eagle High School. Like Eagle, Hawthorne has experienced a dramatic transition. Within a mile of Hawthorne is what is now known as the most violent street in America. During the period of time when Hawthorne was part of the second tier of funded campuses in the reform movement, it received two state awards for the manner in which it was addressing the achievement gap

of underserved students. In 2006, a state magazine rated Hawthorne one of the best middle schools in Texas due to the academic performance of its students.

District 3

Destiny High School is located in an affluent school district in a suburb that has somewhat recently become part of the urban core. An experimental campus, Destiny High School was created for students—some of whom are gifted and talented—who were not thriving in comprehensive high school settings. During my one-year of intensive observations at the school situated within a multi-purpose educational center, the campus had an enrollment of 160 hand-selected students who were interviewed and whose parents signed contracts to assure their admittance.

References

- Amrein, A., & Berliner, D. (2002, March 28). High-stakes testing, uncertainty, and student learning. *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*, 10(18). Retrieved April 24, 2007 from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n18/>.
- Barone, T., & Eisner, E. (1997). Arts-based educational research. In R. M. Jaeger (Ed.) *Complementary methods for research in education (2nd Edition)* (pp. 75-116). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1998). Stories to live by: Narrative understandings of school reform. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 28 (2), 149-162.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Clandinin, D. J., Huber, J., Huber, M., Murphy, S., Murray Orr, A., Pearce, M., & Steeves, P. (2006). *Composing diverse identities: Narrative inquiries into the interwoven lives of children and teachers*. New York: Routledge.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2-14.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1999). *Shaping a professional identity: Stories of educational practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (2005). Narrative inquiry. In J. Green, G. Camilli, & P. Elmore (Eds.) *Handbook of complementary methods in educational research* (pp. 477-489). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

- Craig, C. (2001). The relationships between and among teacher knowledge, communities of knowing, and top down school reform: A case of "The Monkey's Paw." *Curriculum Inquiry*, 31(3), 303-331.
- Craig, C. (2002). The conduit: A meta-level analysis of lives lived and stories told. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 8 (2), 197-221.
- Craig, C. (2003). *Narrative inquiries of school reform: Storied lives, storied landscapes, storied metaphors*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Craig, C. (2004). The dragon in school backyards: The influence of mandated testing on school contexts and educators' narrative knowing. *Teachers College Record*, 106(6), 1229-1257.
- Craig, C. (2006). Why is dissemination so difficult? The nature of teacher knowledge and the spread of curriculum reform. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(2), 257-293.
- Craig, C. (2007). Narrative inquiries of geographically close schools: Similarities and differences in stories given, lived and told. *Teachers College Record*, 109(1), 160-191.
- Craig, C., & Ross, V. (in press). Developing teachers as curriculum makers. In F. M. Connelly (Ed.) *Handbook of curriculum*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Cremin, L. (1990). *Popular education and its discontents*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Czarniawka, B. (1997). *Narrating the organization: Dramas of institutional identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Education and experience*. New York: Collier Books.
- Greene, M. (1978). *Landscapes of learning*. New York: Teachers College Press.

- Jackson, P. W. (1968). *Life in classrooms*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Jackson, P. W. (1968/1990). *Life in classrooms*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Lugones, M. (1987). Playfulness, “world”-traveling, and loving perception. *Hypatia*, 10(2), 23-43.
- Lyons, N. (2006). Narrative inquiry: What possible future influence on policy or practice? In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.) *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 600-631). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.
- Lyons, N., & LaBoskey, V. (2002). *Narrative inquiry in practice: Advancing the knowledge of teaching*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Olson, M. (2000a). Curriculum as a multistoried process. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 25(4), 169-187.
- Olson, M. (2000b). Where the story leads: A response to Cheryl Craig. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 25(4), 349-352.
- Olson, M., & Craig, C. (2005). Uncovering cover stories: Tensions and entailments in the development of teacher knowledge. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 35, 161-182.
- Olson, M., & Craig, C. (2006). *Small stories and meta narratives: Equity? Excellence?* Paper presented at the American Educational Research Meeting, San Francisco, CA.
- Sack, R. D. (1997). *Homo geographicus: A framework for action, awareness, and moral concern*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Schwab, J. J. (1962). The teaching of science as enquiry. In J. J. Schwab & P. Brandwein (Eds.) *The teaching of science*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Schwab, J. J. (1969). The practical: A language for curriculum. *School Review*, 78(1), 1-23.

Schwab, J. J. (1971). The practical: Arts of the eclectic. *School Review*, 81, 461-489.

Schwab, J. J. (1973) The practical 3: Translation into curriculum. *School Review*, 81, 501-522.

Schwab, J. (1983). The practical 4: Something for curriculum professors to do. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 13 (3), 239-265.

Schwab, J. (1954/1978). Eros and education: A discussion of one aspect of discussion. In I. Westbury & N. Wilkof (Ed.) *Science, curriculum and liberal education: Selected essays*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tyler, R. W. (1949). *Basic principles of curriculum and instruction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.