

Teaching and Learning With Self:
Student Perspectives on Authenticity in Alternative Education

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ABSTRACT

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In light of current, high-stakes debates about teacher quality, evaluation, and effectiveness, as well as the increased call for student voice in education reform, this qualitative dissertation explored how nineteen students in two alternative high schools described, understood, and experienced good teachers. More specifically, it considered the teacher qualities and characteristics that student participants named as most important and helpful, regardless of context, subject matter, or grade level. The study also considered how, if at all, participants' sharings could help adapt and extend a model for authenticity in teaching (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004) to the alternative education context.

Two in-depth, qualitative interviews with each of the nineteen participants (approximately 30 hours, transcribed verbatim) were the primary data source. Three focus groups (approximately 3 hours), extended observations (140 hours), and document analysis (e.g., program pamphlets and websites, newspaper articles, classroom handouts) provided additional data. Data analysis involved a number of iterative steps, including writing analytic notes and memos; reviewing, coding, and categorizing data to identify key themes within and across cases; and crafting narrative summaries.

Because participants were drawn to their alternative schools for a variety reasons (e.g., previous school failure, social anxiety/withdrawal, learning or behavioral challenges, etc.), and since participants experienced a wide range of educational environments prior to their current enrollments, this dissertation synthesized and brought together the ideas of a diverse group of

students traditionally considered “at-risk.” Despite their prior struggles, however, participants from both sites described powerful stories of *re-engagement* with school, which they attributed, at least in part, to their work with teachers in their alternative settings. Particularly, findings suggested that, for these nineteen participants, (1) feeling genuinely seen and valued by teachers (in the psychological sense), (2) seeing their teachers as “real” people, and (3) connecting authentically with teachers and others in their alternative school communities led to important academic, social, and personal gains. Given both historical and contemporary constructions of teaching as a selfless act—as one directed *by* or conducted *for* others, for instance—participants’ overwhelming emphasis on mutual recognition and teacher selfhood was an especially important finding. Participants’ reflections and descriptions likewise contributed to the literature on student-teacher relationships by offering a more nuanced, up-close portrait of these and other important school-based relationships in action.

Bringing these findings together, this dissertation presents an expanded, three-part model for authentic teaching in alternative schools that involves *seeing students*, *teaching with self*, and *relating authentically*—including pedagogical takeaways in each of these three domains. It also offers implications for the supports, conditions, and professional learning needed to support teacher growth and interconnectedness in the classroom—and for policies concerning teacher evaluation and retention.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

Despite diverse and competing perspectives about the purposes of schooling (Cuban, 1993; Kliebard, 2004; Labaree, 1997; Tyack & Cuban, 1995), serving *all* students well remains at the forefront of our national educational agenda (Elmore, 2004; Firestone & Riehl, 2005). Moreover, while there are a multitude of factors—both internal and external (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Erikson, 1968, 1980; Marcia, 1980), and social and organizational (Coleman, 1966; Meyer, 1970; Meyer & Rowan, 1977, 1983; Rowan, 1990)—with the potential to influence students' academic achievement and their experiences in school, there is a general agreement that *teachers* remain the most important in-school factor for predicting student success (Johnson & The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2004; Sanders, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). That being said, while both historical (e.g., Callahan, 1962; Flanders, 1961, 1968, 1974; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Thorndike, 1905, 1921) and current (e.g., Duncan, 2009; No Child Left Behind, 2002; Race to the Top, 2011) efforts to measure, define, and quantify the qualities and characteristics of “good” teachers have highlighted many key skills, practices, and knowledge domains essential to the profession, there remains a lack of consensus among educational leaders, researchers, and policy makers regarding just what it is that makes a teacher “good” (Imig & Imig, 2006; Lagemann, 2000). As I will describe throughout this dissertation, asking a group of alternative high school students about their experiences with and understandings of good teachers contributed a new and critical perspective to this very important debate.

While many of us can recall favorite teachers who have helped to make a difference in our lives or the lives of others, such reminiscences often feel slippery or hard-to-define. For instance, in a historical review of how 125 prominent American men and women from different social, economic, racial, geographic, and religious backgrounds described their good teachers in autobiographical writings, Traina (1999) noted that a prominent theme in these reflections was an elusive but “palpable energy that suffused the competent and caring teacher” (p. 34). While it may be hard to pin down this intangible “mark-making quality” (Traina, 1999, p. 34) in both research and reminiscence, it is also true that students—as first-hand participants in the day-to-day goings on of schools and classrooms, and as the targets of many high-stakes educational reforms—may have the most at stake *and* the most immediately available answers when researchers, policy makers, educational leaders, and teacher educators ask the question, “What makes a good teacher?”

Indeed, in today’s accountability-driven climate, this question seems to play an increasingly important role in matters of school and teacher quality reviews, school closures, teacher hiring and firing, and educator promotion and pay (Colvin, 2010; Fuhrman, 2010; Ravitch, 2010; Springer, 2009; Staiger & Rockoff, 2010; Vevea, 2011). Yet, we are also beginning to see that these current definitions and understandings of “good” teachers (i.e., effective from a measurable outcomes perspective) may not reflect the complex needs and perceptions of the students we hope to serve (Veeva, 2011; Schwendenwein, 2012, Ramirez, 2011; Ravitch, 2010, 2010b)—and also may not accord with long-held and deeply treasured (if more intangible) understandings of what it means to teach and learn (e.g., Buber, 1947; Greene, 1967, 1978; Hansen, 1995, 2001, 2011).

Without a clearer understanding of *what really works* for students themselves, our definitions of “good” teachers will remain partial and incomplete. Moreover, given the mounting pressure on teachers, educational leaders, and society to better serve the students who struggle most in our schools, my research explored how nineteen (19) at-risk students in two alternative high schools described, understood, and experienced the qualities, characteristics, and pedagogical practices of good teachers. As I use it here and throughout my dissertation, the term “at-risk” refers to students who—for various reasons—have struggled to thrive in traditional schools academically, emotionally, and/or socially.

It is my hope that my dissertation—as a next step into my life’s work supporting students and educators of all kinds—raises up and honors these students’ wisdom about good teachers, and that it helps teachers, educational leaders, teacher educators, and policy makers to more clearly understand what a diverse group of at-risk students found most important and supportive to them as learners and as human beings.

Below, to help frame the focus of my research, I provide a brief account of the alternative education context. After this, I describe my research purposes more explicitly—including the contributions my study makes to the student voice and teacher quality/effectiveness literatures. Finally, I overview my personal interest in this work, my conceptual framework, and my methodological approach.

The Alternative Education Context

Meeting the needs of the growing number of students disenfranchised from “status quo” education remains a top priority for all educational stakeholders, and alternative education is one possible solution that many students, teachers, families, districts, and states have embraced to address this pressing need (Lehr, Tan & Ysseldyke, 2009). Born of the anti-establishment and

counterculture tendencies of the mid twentieth-century, and heir to early twentieth-century progressive educational philosophy, alternative schools have been both criticized and embraced as dramatic departures from educational conventions (Cuban, 1993; Raywid, 1983, 1994). Championed as more humane, compassionate school enterprises in the late 1960s, alternative schools have fallen in and out of favor over the last decades, but have steadily been adopted as solutions to a variety of social ills, including juvenile delinquency, school violence, racial segregation, and declining school enrollments (Lehr et al., 2009; Raywid, 1983, 1994).

In general, the term “alternative education” refers to all educational activities outside of the traditional K-12 system (Lehr & Lange, 2003). More typically, however, it describes programs serving disenfranchised or at-risk youth (Aron, 2006), and suggests an evolving philosophy and practice aimed at better supporting students who are struggling or underperforming in mainstream environments (Argyris, 1974; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Lehr et al., 2009; McKee & Connor, 2007; Moore, 1978; Raywid, 1983, 1994; Watson, 2011; Wilson, 1976). Officially, the U. S. Department of Education’s working definition of an alternative school or program reads: “a public elementary/secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education or vocational education” (as cited by Lehr & Lange, 2003, p. 59), and it was recently estimated that more than 20,000 such alternative schools or programs exist across the country (Lehr & Lange, 2003). Because of this diversity, I use the terms “school” and “program” interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

Historically, a number of common features characterized the radical, alternative schools that opened early in the movement. Adults in these programs, for instance, embraced informality

with students and relationships beyond traditional conventions. Teachers blended the roles of friend, adult, and teacher and deemphasized customary forms of address, content of speech, and patterns of dress. Also, student-teacher interactions were not limited to school business. Anything that was personally significant (to either students or teachers) was considered relevant for classroom or extracurricular discussion (Wilson, 1976), and, despite the great diversity of early alternative schools, the prioritization of community and active learning wove through many programs as a common ideal (Cuban, 1993).

Perhaps the most concise definition of these early programs was supplied by Argyris (1974): “The basic thrust of alternative schools (public or private) is freedom,” he described, or “opposition to the authoritarian aspects of traditional public and private schools” (p. 429). Significantly, underlying this emphasis on freedom was the assumption that children are naturally curious and eager to learn when interested. According to early alternative education practitioners, “coercion, regimentation, teachers with absolute power, [and] emphasis on obedience and discipline, all combine to inhibit learning” (Argyris, 1974, p. 429)—and, as Cuban (1993) reported, the establishment of early alternative schools indeed coincided with students’ “[g]rowing dissatisfaction with high school rules and behavior requirements, conventional instruction, a lack of participation in decision making, and a curriculum viewed as alien to current youth concerns” (p. 173).

While alternative practitioners’ departure from formalized schooling fostered enthusiasm, loyalty, and a certain degree of freedom for many students and staff, it also created ambiguity. In his qualitative study of one alternative school, for example, Moore (1978) noted that students and teachers alike struggled to integrate their idealism with lingering habits of tradition. In particular, teachers worked to balance personal responsiveness and control. Cuban (1993)

likewise acknowledged that, for many early observers, alternative schools did “not constitute a pedagogical revolution” (citing Duke, 1978, p. 51). As one *New York Times* reporter explained at the time, “The classroom instruction and subject matter are not essentially different from what might be found in many conventional high schools” (Divoky, 1971, as cited by Cuban, 1993, p. 176)—and indeed, it seemed that alternative education, like many efforts at reform, felt the impact of tradition and the enduring pull of the “grammar of schooling” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 85). What *was* different, however, were the smaller sizes and relational student-teacher climates in many alternative schools (Cuban, 1993, p. 174).

Today, a comprehensive review of legislation and policy on alternative schools/programs from 48 states suggests that the number of alternative schools continues to grow (Lehr et al., 2009). Similarly, alternative schools and programs continue in their mission to serve students who are most at-risk of failing in mainstream environments, and there exists an abundance of anecdotal reports about the effectiveness of alternative schools for individual students. Accounts by staff, for instance, describe the transformation of disenfranchised students who made marked gains in academic skills and in life after enrolling in alternative schools (e.g., McGee, 2001). Research also suggests that students attending alternative educational programs (typically of choice) show an increase in self-esteem, motivation, interpersonal relationships, and school performance (e.g., Cox, Davidson, & Bynum, 1995; Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Gold & Mann, 1984; May & Copeland, 1998; Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006; Smith, Gregory, & Pugh, 1981 as cited by Lehr et al., 2009; Watson, 2011). The limited research focusing on alternative school students’ perceptions of their school environments likewise suggests that students generally prefer their alternative settings to traditional schools (e.g., Bernstein, 2009; De La Ossa, 2005; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Saunders & Saunders, 2001).

Given the long history of these programs, the emerging research suggesting their success with students, and the fact that alternative schools may be one of the most wide-spread dropout prevention programs in the United States (Lehr et al., 2009; Souza, 1999), a deeper understanding of how students in these schools describe, understand, and experience good teachers offers promising implications for teacher training and development, and also addresses a significant gap in the literature. Indeed, as I describe in more detail below, no other study to my knowledge has employed a dual-site, in-depth qualitative approach to understanding alternative school students' perspectives about good teachers.

Purpose of the Study

The qualitative research presented in my dissertation served a number of key purposes, which I outline below. In particular, my research served as an opportunity to both build and test theory—from the ground up—about how alternative school students describe, understand, and experience good teachers. This, to the best of my knowledge, is an unexplored area in the literature, and one that accordingly adds to the literatures about student voice and teacher quality/effectiveness.

For example, when alternative school students are asked about their experiences, most researchers have used quantitative survey measures (e.g., Poyrazli, Ferrer-Wreder, Meister, Forthun, Coatsworth & Grahame, 2008; Saunders & Saunders, 2001), shorter, single-session interviews (e.g., <15 minutes) (e.g., Castleberry & Enger, 1998), smaller samples (e.g., Loutzenheiser, 2002), or only focus groups (e.g., De La Ossa, 2005). Others have focused on teachers as well as students (e.g. Watson, 2011), and/or studied the program dynamics of single sites (e.g., Foley, 2009; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Saunders & Saunders, 2001; Watson, 2011). Moreover, within the rather limited literature on alternative schools in general (a recent Web of

Science search for “alternative school,” for example, yielded only 111 unfiltered results—many of which concerned other topics upon review), a large majority of studies focused on particular risk factors like violence, sexual activity, or substance abuse (e.g., Markham, Tortolero & Escobar-Chavez, 2003; Peters, Tortolero & Addy, 2003; Shrier & Crosby, 2003), behavioral interventions (e.g., Simonsen, Britton & Young, 2010; Turton, Umbreit & Mathur, 2011), or program effects more generally (e.g., Cox, Davidson, & Bynum, 1995; Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Gold & Mann, 1984; May & Copeland, 1998; Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006; Smith, Gregory, & Pugh, 1981 as cited by Lehr et al., 2009).

When it comes specifically to the question of what makes a good teacher, then, these students have not been asked in this way. In other words, prior to my research, alternative school students have not been asked to reflect deeply about their experiences with teachers as part of an in-depth qualitative interview study spanning multiple sites. As I describe in more detail below in the section on “student voice,” there is a growing sense that students *can and should* contribute to our understandings of teaching and leading (Cook-Sather, 2006, 2010; Flutter, 2006; Fullan, 1992 as cited by Oerlemans & Vidovich, 2005; Levin, 2000; Rudduck & Demetriou, 2003)—and my study contributes to this literature by highlighting the unique perspectives of a diverse sample of alternative high school students. In addition, and as I also describe below, learnings from these students provide an important, ground-up complement to current conceptualizations and measures of teacher quality and effectiveness—and are offered in the spirit of supporting *all* school participants in their shared enterprise of education.

Contribution to the Student Voice Literature

Traditionally, education reform has been the domain of adults (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006, 2010; Corbett & Wilson, 1995; Levin, 2000; Oerlemans & Vidovich, 2005). As Fullan (1991) noted:

When adults do think of students, they think of them as the potential beneficiaries of change. They think of achievement, results, skills, attitudes, and jobs. They rarely think of students as participants in a process of change and organizational life. (as cited by Corbett & Wilson, 1995, p. 170)

Indeed, such a top-down, hierarchical approach—while claiming to exist *for* students—nonetheless positions students as the *objects* of reforms (Levin, 2000), and leaves individual learners (particularly those most at-risk) to manage new initiatives and requirements that may not fit their needs.

From this perspective, it seems clear that successful teaching and leading require the fullest possible understandings of students' experiences in general (Cook-Sather, 2006, 2010; Flutter, 2006; Fullan, 1992 as cited by Oerlemans & Vidovich, 2005; Levin, 2000; Rudduck & Demetriou, 2003)—and of the experiences of students targeted by educational interventions and reforms in particular (Cook-Sather, 2002; Garcia, 2006; Nieto, 1994; Corbett & Wilson, 1995; Wilson & Corbett, 2001; Yonezawa & Jones, 2009). In response to this need, researchers over the past 20 years have begun to call for “student voice,” premised on the notions that:

young people have unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling; that their insights warrant not only the attention but also the responses of adults; and that they should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education. (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 359)

In many ways, these premises challenge previously held conceptions of students as empty receptacles to be filled or entities to control (Callahan, 1962; Skinner, 1969; Spring, 1976, all cited by Cook-Sather, 2002), and demand that teachers, researchers, educational leaders, and

policy makers consider “the potentially vital contributions that students might make to our understanding of good teaching” (Reich, 1996, p. 10).

While the growing emphasis placed on valuing student perspectives in education is important for *all* learners (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006, 2010; Corbett & Wilson, 1995; Flutter, 2006; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2008; Oerlemans & Vidovich, 2005; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000), such a focus may be especially key for improving educational services for at-risk students. Research suggests, for instance, that listening to the voices of struggling or underperforming students—students who, historically, have been viewed through lenses of individual and cultural deficit (Cummins, 1986; Deschenes et al., 2001; MacLeod, 1995, all cited by Cassidy & Bates, 2005)—can help carve out new areas of understanding about effective teacher practice (Corbett & Wilson, 1995) and also positively impact student buy-in, motivation, and participation (Colsant, 1995; Hudson-Ross, Cleary, & Casey, 1993; Oldfather et al., 1999; Sanon, Baxter, Fortune, & Opotow, 2001; Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001, all cited by Cook-Sather, 2002). As Schor (1986) noted, at-risk students “will resist anything that disempowers them” (as cited by Johnston & Nicholls, 1995, p. 94), so including them in dialogue about their educational experiences is one important way to help bring their voices to the proverbial table.

Yet, as Rudduck and Flutter (2000) noted, students can reflect on and recall only what they’ve experienced, and may accordingly have little sense of alternative possibilities beyond the status quo. In this way, learning from students who have experienced *both* mainstream and alternative educational environments—as I do in this research—helps illuminate a *wider variety* of effective teacher qualities, practices, and characteristics, and may also provide essential insights for supporting *both* children and adults undertaking this important work. Below, I

describe in more detail how this research contributes to the literature on teacher quality and effectiveness.

Contribution to the Teacher Quality and Effectiveness Literature

As Kennedy (2008) recently noted, “teacher quality has become a hot topic” (p. 59). Yet, researchers, policy makers, and practitioners continue to debate what being a “good,” “quality” or “effective” teacher means. In some camps, for instance, “teacher quality” concerns teachers’ tested ability—or their scores on standardized achievement and professional exams (e.g., Angrista & Guryan, 2007; Corcoran, Evans, & Schwab, 2004). For others, teacher quality rests at the intersection of professional preparation and training, official certification, and the extent of classroom experience (e.g., Bacolod, 2007; Hoxby & Leigh, 2004; Johnson et al., 2004). Still others focus on teachers’ instructional practices—the work they do directly with students—or their so-called effectiveness in raising student test scores (e.g., Nicholson, 2008; Stewart, 2006; Webster & Mendro, 1995). Despite these competing definitions, however, the extent to which students’ perspectives of good teachers inform this debate remains extremely limited (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006, 2010; Corbett & Wilson, 1995; Flutter, 2006; Oerlemans & Vidovich, 2005; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). In this way, my research offers a new perspective on teacher quality by learning from students in two alternative high schools—settings that have been shown to help struggling, disenfranchised learners both academically and personally—about the teacher characteristics, practices, and qualities that are most important to them.

Given the complicated, heated debate about both *how* and *what* to assess when evaluating teachers, and the pendular back-and-forth between prioritizing inputs and outputs in measures of teacher quality, my study was guided by the premise that students themselves can and should contribute to wider understandings of what it means to be a good teacher. In particular, by

further exploring what felt most important about teachers to lower- and under-performing students, this study can help teachers, school leaders, and other educational stakeholders more effectively serve students, support teacher practice, and meet the growing demands of our current accountability climate.

Personal Interest

By both luck and design, it was my privilege to spend nearly ten years in alternative education environments as a teacher and school administrator before pursuing my doctoral studies. Working across these roles confirmed for me the great importance of *listening* to the voices, reactions, and assessments of both students and teachers, and of integrating these perspectives into plans for improvement. In particular, my dissertation research stems from the great respect and admiration I hold for the students I have gotten to know and teach over the years, as well as from the burning questions that bubbled up for me as a school administrator.

In terms of my specific professional experiences, I worked as a teacher in residential and day treatment facilities, an alternative program within a traditional high school, and a K-12 charter school for students with ADHD or Asperger's Disorder. I also served as the Assistant Director of this same charter school, and was concurrently teaching high school English classes while caring for school operations and the supervision and mentorship of teachers. Contextually, the different schools I served in were located in both urban and suburban areas, and my students were diverse in terms of age, race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, learning preferences, and ability. In all of these cases, I came across a wide disaffection within schools that transcended race, gender, sexuality, and socio-economic status—and a system that let a growing number of students “fall through the cracks” despite increased social pressures and reform efforts. On the other hand, I have also seen many wonderful teachers help students

overcome difficulties and find greater success in their academic and personal lives. This range of experiences—as well as the blessing of my former students—all inspire this qualitative study.

For instance, one of my former students assured me, when I told him I was thinking about exploring this research at Teachers College, that this is “really important” work. “It’s such a great thing that you’re going to New York,” he wrote in my yearbook at the end of that year. “I think it’s a wonderful opportunity and I’m proud that you took it. To be honest I would be mad if you didn’t.” While it was very hard for me to leave my classroom and the field, I promised the students in my school that I would be representing them in new and different ways, and their encouragement and confidence continue to echo in my ears and drive my work and learning.

Similarly, as the Assistant Director of the K-12 charter school mentioned above, I ran up against what felt like a fundamental question of leadership: How can school leaders best support teachers in their challenging but rewarding work—especially in higher-needs contexts? While, inarguably, the answer to this question is complex and multifaceted, I found myself wishing at times that I knew more about what the *students* would say in response to teachers’ questions and stumbling blocks. I did my best, of course, to offer teachers any wisdom or insight I could muster from my own experiences with students in the classroom, but I often struggled as an administrator to articulate some of the tacit lessons I’d learned over the years about working with at-risk students. Moreover, it became clear to me that I lacked an explicit language or framework for talking about important subtleties of practice, and this pressing need similarly informed and inspired my study.

On another note, I feel that my familiarity with the world of alternative education and my extensive experience establishing trust and rapport with students as a teacher and leader in similar settings benefited my work as a researcher. It has been both my honor and privilege to

talk with adolescents throughout my career—and I hope that my experiences have helped me understand and push forward this work in meaningful ways. In the end, I firmly believe that in order to really improve education, we need to begin with the opinions of the learners whose studies—and futures—are most at-risk. It is likewise my conviction that learning from students’ perspectives about what constitutes a good teacher holds great potential for informing teacher preparation and professional development, school leadership strategies and practices, and larger-scale policies and reforms.

Research Questions

The purpose of my qualitative study was to understand how nineteen (19) students from two alternative high school programs described, understood, and experienced “good teachers.” More specifically, I sought to identify the commonalities and differences, if any, that emerged from participants’ descriptions and understandings of good teachers—as well as the qualities, traits, and characteristics they named as most important (and why these mattered to them). I also explored, how, if at all, participants’ sharings could inform or be informed by Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004) framework for authentic teaching—a grounded-theory model that was developed in and for the higher education context. As I describe in more detail below and in future sections, I explored how, if at all, this model applied in this new context (i.e., alternative high schools) and from a new perspective (i.e., from students’ rather than university professors’ points-of-view). Accordingly, my research asked three fundamental questions:

1. How do nineteen (19) students in two alternative high schools describe, understand, and experience good teachers?
2. Regardless of context, subject matter, or grade level, what, if anything, stands out as most important to these students about good teachers? Supportive? Effective?

3. How, if at all, might Cranton & Carusetta's (2004) framework for authentic teaching inform or be informed by these students' perspectives? The alternative education context?

By addressing the first two questions I sought to build an understanding (i.e., theory building or grounded theory building, Strauss & Corbin, 1998) of how these students described, understood, and experienced what constitutes a “good teacher”—including any important qualities, characteristics, or attributes that transcended context, subject, or grade level. At the heart of this inquiry rested a desire to better understand students' individual meaning-making, thoughts, feelings, and lived experiences as learners. By exploring the third question, I aspired to understand how, if at all, students' perspectives about “good teachers” might inform or be informed by Cranton & Carusetta's (2004) framework for authentic teaching, which was developed through research with university faculty. While I discuss this model in greater detail in the next section and in Chapter 2, it is important to note here that this framework helped me to synthesize findings from a pilot study (Blum, 2009) that preceded and informed my dissertation research (I describe this study in detail in Chapter 2). Similarly, Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) framework also helped me to gather and organize compatible literatures from the K-12 and at-risk contexts in promising ways. Accordingly, in this study, I both tested and expanded theory in relation to this framework by further examining these connections and extensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Maxwell, 2005).

Conceptual Framework

In order to help frame and contextualize my research, I have taken a somewhat unconventional approach to synthesizing a conceptual framework. While, for instance, my study is ostensibly about students, it is also expressly and intentionally about *teachers*, and as such, my

conceptual framework draws together relevant but inter-disciplinary bodies of literature about *both students and teachers* from educational research, history, psychology, and philosophy in new ways. First, and to help set the stage for all that follows, I describe historical perspectives on understanding and defining good teachers to help establish a macro-level context—and contrast—for my ground-up approach to addressing this important question from an angle that had not yet been explored. Indeed, this section helps underscore why listening to “student voice” in matters of teacher quality and effectiveness is a particularly important and promising approach. In other words, this section helps demonstrate *why* learning from alternative high school students’ perspectives about good teachers serves as an important contrast and complement to dominant understandings of teachers’ work.

As I will describe in more detail in Chapter 2, the four remaining dimensions of my conceptual framework stem in large part from learnings from my 2009 pilot study, in which I explored how five (5) alternative high school students described and understood good teaching. While my research focus was slightly different during the pilot study than in this current research (i.e., I asked students in the pilot about good *teaching* rather than good *teachers*), it nonetheless emerged that, for these five students, it was the *person* who filled the role of teacher that seemed to matter most in their definitions of good teaching—and their descriptions involved nuances of identity and connection for both students and teachers.

Given this preliminary finding, I wanted to learn more about how, if at all, students understood teacher selfhood as connected to good teaching. To help illustrate and contextualize why this idea is important, I next describe the long history of controlling—and ostensibly taking the self out of—teachers’ classroom practice, including the key role that gender has played in our current conceptualizations of the profession. Here, again, the idea is to take a more macro-level

view in order to pull back the curtain on some of the reasons *behind* the constraining conditions and expectations that currently challenge *all* teachers—both men and women—to bring their “selves” into their work with students.

Because my 2009 pilot study was instrumental in generating new questions that I explored in my dissertation research, I next present my pilot study methodology and a summary of important learnings. While I draw from my pilot findings—and also from my experience hosting a podcast¹ with three New York City high school students about their experiences with good teachers—in later sections of my conceptual framework, I offer this summary here in order to preview some of the important themes that inform my research questions and my study.

Next, I present Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004) framework for authentic teaching, which is a grounded-theory model developed through a qualitative investigation of twenty-two (22) university faculty members’ teaching. While the model was developed in and for the higher education context and drew from university teachers’ descriptions of authentic teaching practice, the five dimensions of the framework (i.e., self, other, the relationship between the two, context, and a critically reflective approach) nonetheless helped bring clarity and focus to my pilot study findings by providing categories in which to cluster and synthesize students’ descriptions of good teaching. Given this promising link, I used Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004) framework to inform both my literature review and data analysis. In fact, as I shared when discussing my research questions, I was keenly interested in investigating the applicability of this model in a new context (i.e., alternative high schools) and from a different angle (i.e., from high school students’ perspectives) in order to both build and test theory and potentially contribute new

¹ As part of my work at EdLab—a research, design, and development unit at Teachers College, Columbia University—I co-hosted an experimental podcast called *Your Permanent Record?* that invited educators and students to talk about education-related topics of interest.

knowledge. However, as I describe in greater detail in Chapter 3, I did not ask student participants about these ideas directly, but rather used the framework's dimensions as a lens to consider participants' sharings and responses.

Finally, under the organizing umbrella of Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) framework, I weave together relevant inter-disciplinary literatures from the K-12 and at-risk contexts that accord with pilot participants' sharings about good teachers. My aim in this section is to bring together diverse and traditionally distinct literatures—including empirical, psychological, and philosophical writings about teachers, students, identity, and their interconnection—in order demonstrate the parallels that already exist and lend credence to the idea of “authenticity” as a promising lens for teacher practice, and also because these bodies of work significantly inform my research questions. While I draw from and combine distinct bodies of work in this section in new and different ways, it is my hope that this synthesis presents a rich tapestry of ideas that suggests the promise of what participants have to say about the importance of authenticity for both students and teachers.

Research Methodology

In this section, I provide a brief overview my research methodology. Given my focus on learning from individuals' meaning-making, I begin with my rationale for selecting a qualitative approach. I then discuss the criteria that guided the selection of sites and participants, as well as my approach to data collection and analysis. I conclude this summary by previewing the ways I attended to validity threats, including researcher bias, reactivity, and descriptive, interpretive and theoretical validity.

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

Because I sought to understand the individual meaning-making, thoughts, feelings, and

lived experiences of alternative high school students, a qualitative methodology (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009) most appropriately matched my research questions and study goals.

Accordingly, for my dissertation research, I conducted an in-depth qualitative study that involved prolonged observations, individual student interviews, and focus groups in order to understand students' descriptions, understandings, and personal experiences with good teachers and to extend prior knowledge about student perspectives. I elected not to use quantitative methods (e.g., surveys, questionnaires) since that methodology would not have enabled me to address the research questions that guided my inquiry as deeply.

Sampling

Below I describe my rationale and criteria for site and participant selection.

Selection of sites. For my dissertation research, I purposefully selected two alternative high school sites that met my selection criteria: Ellis Academy and Civis High School (pseudonyms). The sites were selected according to the following criteria: enrollment philosophy (i.e., how and why students enrolled), the number of students in the program, researcher access, and geographic location. I discuss each of these in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Because alternative schools have successfully served many at-risk, lower- or under-performing students (Aron, 2006; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Raywid, 1983) for more than 50 years, and since students (and their parents) are drawn to alternative schools for a multitude of reasons (e.g., previous school failure, social withdrawal, learning or behavioral challenges, etc.), sampling students within these two alternative high school programs allowed me to explore my research questions with a diverse group of students in the “at-risk” category. Additionally, using a multiple case study approach to explore students' experiences in two separate settings allowed for more robust data for comparison and possible theory building (Yin, 2009).

Selection of participants. In terms of selection criteria for participants, my aim was to learn from as diverse a sample of students at each alternative high school program as possible. However, the most important selection criteria for my sample were that these students (a) volunteered to participate in this study and (b) agreed to participate in 2 interviews and 1 focus group. I had a target of learning from 16-20 students, so I was pleased that nineteen (19) students ultimately volunteered as participants.

Data Collection

Drawing from phenomenological methods (Moustakas, 1994), which seek to explore participants' lived experiences around particular phenomena (such as "good teaching"), and multiple case study designs (Yin, 2009), which explore questions of process and sense-making within and across given contexts (such as alternative schools), in-depth qualitative interviews served as the primary data source for this study (2 with each of the nineteen participants, approximately 30 hours total). In addition, three focus groups (approximately 3 total hours), extensive observations at each site (140 combined hours), and document analysis (program literature and media) provided additional data.

After establishing trust and rapport through presentations of my research purposes and early observations, I conducted 2 interviews with each of the nineteen (19) participants (13 from Ellis Academy, and 6 from Civis High School). Each of the interviews, which lasted about 45 minutes, focused on different yet related aspects of my research questions, and allowed participants time to describe and reflect on their experiences with good teachers. More specifically, the first interview invited participants to share their background information and general reflections about good teachers, while the second provided a more structured opportunity to reflect about good teachers using the ORID (Objective-Relational-Interpretive-Decisional)

Framework (Spencer, 1989; Stanfield, 1997) after revisiting key ideas from Interview 1. Focus groups served as an additional opportunity to member-check (Maxwell, 2005) important ideas and themes as I invited participants in these small groups to collaboratively consider, discuss, and expand upon learnings that emerged from interviews.

Data Analysis

As I describe in detail in Chapter 3, data analysis involved a number of key steps, which I approached as a systematic, iterative process (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). These steps included:

1. writing analytic notes and memos (Maxwell, 2005) after observations, interviews, and focus groups,
2. transcribing interviews and focus groups verbatim and reviewing transcripts for accuracy (Maxwell, 2005; Maxwell & Miller, 1998),
3. coding transcripts with theoretical (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) and emic codes (Geertz, 1974),
4. categorizing for central concepts (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004; Strauss & Corbin, 1998),
5. crafting narrative summaries (Maxwell, 2005) and participant profiles (Seidman, 1998, 2006), and
6. building and analyzing within-case and cross-case matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Validity

Here, I preview the intentional and systematic ways I attended to validity issues in relation to my research design and data analysis (I discuss these in greater detail in Chapter 3).

First, I addressed my biases as a researcher (Maxwell, 2005) by writing analytic notes and memos throughout the study to examine my preconceptions and assumptions and to chronicle my thinking over time (Drago-Severson, 2010). My prolonged engagement at each site (approximately 2 days per week at each site for 3 months) also addressed reactivity (Maxwell, 2005), as it allowed me to strengthen trust, familiarity, and rapport (Maxwell, 2005; Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2005). In order to attend to descriptive validity—or the accuracy of what was seen and heard during the study (Maxwell, 1992)—all interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim (Thomas et al., 2005; Maxwell, 2005). Employing emic and “experience-near” (Geertz, 1974) language in coding and analysis, as well as member-checking during the second interview and the focus groups, also helped me attend to interpretive validity, or the accuracy of my interpretations of participants’ meaning-making (Maxwell, 1992, 2005). Examining the data for both “confirming” and “disconfirming” instances of themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 216) and discrepant data likewise contributed to theoretical validity (Maxwell, 1992, 2005).

Limitations

As a qualitative study with a relatively small sample size, findings from this research are generalized only to participants (Maxwell, 2005). Moreover, as this study concerns individual students’ meaning-making about good teachers—rather than the “impact” of good teachers on student performance—findings from this study could be extended by future research exploring the possible links between good teachers as described by participants and achievement data, as well as teachers’ perspectives. Nevertheless, the methodological design outlined above may allow for a degree of “face generalizability” (Singer, as cited in Maxwell, 2005)—or the development of a theory of good teachers that may be extended to or tested in other cases.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW & CONCEPTUAL CONTEXT

You ought to go to a boy's school.... It's full of phonies....
– Holden Caulfield, *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1954)

In this chapter I describe the interrelated areas of research and theory that inform my study and research questions, including: (1) historical perspectives on understanding and defining good teachers; (2) the complex history of controlling teachers' work, including gender as one important lens; (3) a methodological overview of my 2009 qualitative pilot study exploring five alternative school students' understandings of good teaching, including a summary of key findings, (4) Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) framework for authentic teaching, which was developed in and for the higher education context; and (5) a synthesis of K-12 connections to the framework's dimensions, with particular emphasis on the literature pertaining to at-risk students.

While I have taken a somewhat unconventional and integrative approach to presenting my conceptual context by weaving together inter-disciplinary literature from educational history, research, psychology, and philosophy, I do this because, as mentioned earlier, my study and research questions—although ostensibly about students—also expressly and intentionally concern *teachers*. As I describe throughout this chapter, in order to contextualize and make space for the kinds of things students share about good teachers, it is important to understand the conditions, traditions, and pressures that shape teachers' work. In this way, and as I shared in my purpose statement (please see Chapter 1), this study helps contribute to the literature

documenting “student voice”—and also informs understandings of what it means to be a good teacher.

The first section is intended to help contextualize this study’s potential contributions with a wide-angle overview of contemporary and historical approaches to identifying, measuring, and thinking about the qualities and characteristics of good teachers, including the potential consequences of more quantitative, “scientific” approaches. In contrast, by asking students to weigh in on the fundamental and very important question of what makes a good teacher, my research offers a new dimension to more traditional ways of defining, evaluating, and supporting teacher practice.

The second section zooms in closely on the systemic controls and expectations that have intentionally and unintentionally constrained aspects of teachers’ practice throughout the history of the American public school system, including the role that gender has played in shaping understandings of the profession. Because findings from my pilot study suggested that the *person* who filled the role of teacher was very important to students, and because my dissertation research further explored nuances of identity and connection for both students and teachers, this section helps to illuminate the pressures and constraints that currently challenge *all* teachers—both men and women—to bring their “selves” into their work with students. By describing some of the history behind these pressures, this section also positions these controls as socially constructed—rather than somehow intrinsic or inevitable—and thus amenable to change.

In the third section, I present an overview of my 2009 pilot study and a summary of key learnings. While my research focus was slightly different in the pilot study than in my dissertation research (i.e., in my pilot study, I asked 5 students in one alternative high school program about good *teaching* rather than good *teachers*), this preliminary investigation helped

me to generate new learnings and questions that played an instrumental role my dissertation research design. Because of this, I offer a summary of key findings here in order to preview some of the important themes that inform my research questions and my study.

Next, I present Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) framework for authentic teaching, which emerged from my pilot findings as a potentially informative and helpful lens for interpreting students' sharings about good teachers. While the framework was developed in and for the higher education context through a qualitative study of twenty-two (22) university faculty members' teaching, my dissertation explored the applicability of this model in a new context (i.e., alternative high schools) and from a different angle (i.e., from students' perspectives) in order to both build and test theory and contribute new knowledge.

Related to this study goal, I conclude this chapter by weaving together relevant interdisciplinary literatures from the K-12 and at-risk contexts under the organizing umbrella of Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) framework. In this section, I bring together literatures from different fields—including empirical, psychological, and philosophical writings about teachers, students, identity, and their interconnection—in order illuminate the parallels to “authentic teaching” that already exist (although this concept has not, to my knowledge, been studied in this way), and also because these bodies of literature significantly inform my research questions and study design.

It is my hope that this chapter and this synthesis present a rich tapestry of ideas that highlight the potential contributions of my dissertation research—for both students and teachers.

Traditional Approaches to Defining Good Teachers

Since the early days of educational research, it has been clear that an exact science of teaching will elude us. As Harvard philosopher Josiah Royce proclaimed in the very first issue

of *Educational Review* in 1891, there is “no universally valid science of pedagogy...capable of...complete formulation and...direct application to individual pupils and teachers” (as cited by Lagemann, 2000, p. ix). Along these same lines, while it is generally recognized that teachers are the most important in-school factor for predicting student success (Sanders, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2009), little consensus exists regarding what constitutes a “good” teacher, or how, exactly, to prepare one. Despite the multifaceted dimensions of good teaching and what Maxine Greene (1967b) called the “profoundly human” nature of education in general (p. 2)—or, perhaps, because of these complexities—there are and have been many approaches to defining and understanding good teaching. While learning from students about what matters most to *them* about good teachers will not “solve” or clarify these ambiguities, my research nonetheless contributes a new perspective to this ongoing conversation, and serves as an important contrast and complement to many current approaches to defining good teachers.

Today, for instance, influential methods often focus on a teacher’s knowledge, skills or qualifications (The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2004) or on a teacher’s approach to pedagogy (City, Elmore, Fiarman & Teitel, 2009; Shulman, 1986; Elmore, 2008, 2010; Newmann, Marks & Gamoran, 1995, 1996). Over the years, too, we have seen check-list style measurements of teacher competencies (e.g., Flanders, 1961, 1968, 1974) and other attempts to quantify and measure good teaching (e.g., Nicholson, 2008) in light of mounting testing and accountability demands (e.g., the Common Core State Standards initiative, the No Child Left Behind Act, and now Race to the Top incentives). While all of these approaches inarguably offer *many* helpful insights and strategies for thinking about, evaluating, and measuring teacher quality, the growing focus on concrete, observable measures potentially eclipses other very important dimensions of teaching (Godin,

2010; Lagemann, 1989, 1997, 2000; Hansen, 1995, 2001, 2011), and leaves out the perspectives of students (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006, 2010; Corbett & Wilson, 1995; Flutter, 2006; Oerlemans & Vidovich, 2005; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000).

Indeed, this tendency to rely on *what can be seen and counted* in terms of teacher quality led educational historian Ellen Condliffe Lagemann (1989) to declare that, in terms of the paradigm war that shaped the direction of educational research, policy, and practice at the turn of the twentieth century, “Edward L. Thorndike won and John Dewey lost” (p. 185)—meaning that scientific objectivism ultimately held sway over more relational or subtle understandings of teaching. Still, while the field no longer contends—as did early quantitative researchers like the prolific and very accomplished Edward Thorndike—that ground-level communications with students are unnecessary and a waste of a researcher’s time (Joncich, 1968 as cited by Lagemann, 1997), it is *still* the case that the experiences of most students do not “count” in conversations about what constitutes a good teacher. Today, for instance, many teachers, researchers, educational leaders and reformers increasingly subscribe to the principle that “If you can’t see it in the classroom, it’s not there” (Elmore, 2008, p. 4). As I strive to make clear throughout this dissertation, students’ feelings, thinking, and lived realities *are* there in the classroom (even if we can’t see them directly)—and better understanding these perspectives is an important purpose of my research.

Not too long ago, Schalock, Schalock, and Myton (1998) argued—in a heated response to a special issue of *Phi Delta Kappan* on teacher quality and effectiveness—that:

No one is well served by incomplete conceptions of teaching. A quality assurance system for teachers that focuses only on what teachers know and are able to do, rather than on what they are able (indeed, obligated) to accomplish, is—in our view, at least—limited, misleading, and detrimental to the professionalization of teaching. (p. 468)

While these authors argued strongly for adopting outcomes-based measures and “quality assurance systems” for teachers (p. 469), their point that “incomplete conceptions” serve no one well resonates with the arguments of many of the student participants in this study. Indeed, as I will discuss in my findings chapters (i.e., Chapters 5-8), inviting students to contribute to the ongoing dialogue about what constitutes a good teacher helped to paint an even richer and more vibrant picture of teacher quality and effectiveness—with implications for teacher practice, training, and professional development, as well as leadership and policy.

The (Unintended) Consequences of Traditional Definitions of Teacher Quality and Accountability Measures

Increasingly, scholars are beginning to argue that high-stakes testing, accountability measures, and efforts to quantify and measure teacher effectiveness (ostensibly to improve teacher performance and quality) have impacted classroom pedagogy in potentially harmful ways (e.g., Hansen, 2011; Ravitch, 2010; Wheatley, 2005; Willis & Sandholtz, 2009). Educators, especially those serving in the highest-needs settings (Kozol, 2005; Lipman, 2004), face increased scrutiny and pressure—and studies continue to link such teaching and learning environments to less effective, controlling teacher behaviors (Black, 2008; Deci, Spiegel, Ryan, Koestner, & Kauffman, 1982; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Tasked with navigating a multitude of policies, mandates, and directives in order to serve students while also protecting their jobs and livelihoods, many educators are adopting the new “culture of testing”—despite the dearth of evidence connecting such approaches to improved student commitment or achievement.

Many researchers, for instance, are finding that teachers are altering their instruction to focus on rote skill-and-drill practices over higher-order thinking in order to meet testing and evaluation demands (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Nichols & Berliner, 2005; Wong, Anagnostopoulos, Rutledge, & Edwards, 2003); and we are becoming all too familiar with the

phenomenon of “teaching to the test”—a short-term “solution” to the much larger challenge and imperative of providing all students with an equitable and quality education. Similarly, in a meta-synthesis of 49 qualitative studies examining the effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum throughout the United States from 1992-2006, Au (2007) found that teachers narrowed their curricular focus to tested subjects in nearly 70% of studies, presented fragmented subject area knowledge to fit testing categories in nearly 50% of studies, and adopted a more teacher-centric stance in approximately 65%. Giles and Hargreaves (2006), in a study of the ways testing and accountability pressures countered the aims and actions of innovative schools, similarly illuminated a tendency toward “recidivism”—or a falling back from intended innovations—and a return to conventionality in response to increased regulation of teachers’ work.

While many, like McWilliam (2008), argue that a “transmissive pedagogical culture is increasingly irrelevant” (p. 264), it is perhaps one of the greatest and most unfortunate ironies of accountability reforms that such methods remain on the rise in response to increased pressures. As one rising senior from Harlem, New York, offered to all teachers during a podcast episode I hosted about good teaching (I will share more of my learning from this session in later sections), “If you teach your students to *teach* them, they will definitely pass the test, but if you teach your students to just pass the test they might fail the test. That’s what I think” (Your Permanent Record?, 2010b). As this one small example helps to illustrate, students can tell us a lot about what works—and what does not—in educational practice. By further exploring students’ understandings, descriptions, and experiences with good teachers, then, my research offers a new perspective on the consequences of our current approaches to defining and evaluating teachers’ work and also suggests new ways to understand, support, and retain good teachers.

Indeed, as Lagemann (2000) made clear, the pervasive push “away from close interactions with policy and practice and toward excessive quantification and scientism” harbors many consequences for teachers as well as students (p. xi). Given the large number of teachers leaving the profession, especially from the highest-needs contexts, it is important to explore new ways to understand, evaluate, and *support* the work of good teachers (Johnson et al., 2004; U. S. Department of Education, 2009).

A Long History of Controlling Teachers’ Work

Don’t look where you have fallen, look where you slipped.
– African proverb as cited by Leiding (2008, p. 1)

One of the most important learnings that I took away from my pilot study—and one that I explored further in my dissertation research—was the essential role that *individual identity and personality* played in students’ description of good teachers. Yet, as I describe in this section, teachers have been consistently encouraged, or even required, to take the “self” out of teaching. While, as I describe later in this chapter, there have always been alternatives to this self-*less* ideal, there exists a long and enduring tradition of controlling teachers’ work that continues to inform teacher practice today. After more than a century of education reform driven by metaphors of industry and empiricism and characterized by great hopes for and disappointments in the promise of innovation, teachers (like students) remain the *objects* of reform, and have experienced a significant intensification of their work over the past decades (Apple 1983, 1985). In more than 30 national and 300 state-wide reports conducted since the beginning of the 20th century, for instance, teachers have regularly been reduced to the status of “high-level technicians carrying out dictates and objectives decided by ‘experts’ far removed from the everyday realities of classroom life” (Giroux, 1985, pp. 205-206).

Despite this long history of quantifying and controlling teachers' work (Callahan, 1962; Kliebard, 2004; Lagemann, 1997, 2000; Natriello, 2005), it is important to recognize that the current system—with its emphasis on measurable outcomes and standardized curricula—is not an uncontested “given,” but rather the result of an ongoing ideological and social debate. As Hargreaves (2000) noted:

What has come to be regarded as ‘real school’ to many people, as the seemingly normal, natural and given way to organize teaching and curriculum, is [actually] ... a highly specific socio-historical invention, rooted in the needs and concerns of generations past. (p. 154)

Indeed, looking back carefully at the complex history and evolution of schooling can help shed light on some of its foundational conditions, which in turn can help us answer questions about why things are the way they are and how we can move forward. Why, for instance, have teachers historically been subject to such intense scrutiny and control, relative to many other professions? From where do some of the assumptions driving the standardization and accountability movements stem? How did we get here?

While there are of course many ways of thinking about and answering these very important questions, the role that gender played in the development of the teaching profession remains one promising lens for illuminating the seeds of teacher control. Below, I offer an overview of how, in American education, “the gendered beliefs and practices of the past” remain “represented in the present” (Blackmore & Kenway, 1993, p. 9). While, of course, the gender demographics of school teachers, leaders, and policy makers have shifted tremendously since the 19th and early 20th centuries, as we have seen an increase of both men in the classroom and women in leadership positions, it is also the case that the gendered structures that defined early American public schools continue to inform our current systems and policies in ways both explicit and subtle, for both men and women. Moreover, while I focus below on the feminization of teaching

in the United States, it is important to note that similar patterns of professional recruiting and control have been documented in other Western countries like Germany, Canada, Wales, Denmark, Sweden, Russia, and Italy (Albisetti, 1993). Again, better understanding these influences and conditions helps contextualize the contributions of my research—and also the deep significance of what students have to say about the “self” of the teacher.

The Feminization of Teaching: Expanded Opportunity Amidst Increased Control

Since colonial times and through the 1840s, teaching in the United States was largely a male enterprise. Although women were always involved in education—most notably through aptly named “dame” schools run by women for female and very young pupils (Strober & Lanford, 1986)—it wasn’t until the latter half of the nineteenth century that women began to fill a majority of teaching positions, particularly in elementary schools (Hoffman, 2003; Strober & Tyack, 1980). While teaching was originally associated with “masculine” virtues such as emotional control, intellectual superiority, and physical dominance (Preston, 1993), economic and ideological pressures throughout the nineteenth century set the stage for radical transformations of popular understandings of teaching—and ushered in the feminization of the profession (Albisetti, 1993; Kessler-Harris, 2003; Riehl & Lee, 1996; Strober & Tyack, 1980). As I argue in this section, in the company of other scholars (Apple, 1983, 1985; Riehl & Lee, 1996; Strober & Tyack, 1980), these changes simultaneously brought about increased opportunities for women and tighter, hierarchical control over teachers’ work—effects that persist today.

Just before the turn of the twentieth century, the dramatic population growth and rising numbers of immigrants that flooded schools quickly increased the demand for teachers in most urban areas and spurred public interest in universal education as a means to protect and transmit

American values. At the same time, industrialization lured men from the schoolhouse with new economic opportunities—and opened the classroom door to new levels of female participation (Riehl & Lee, 1996; Strober & Tyack, 1980). Rather quickly, educational reformers, women advocates, and popular writers recognized the “natural” fit between women and teaching, and championed a form of public motherhood that would simultaneously expand women’s domestic sphere, address logistical and budgetary problems in schools, and prepare women for their “true” calling as wives and mothers in service to the nation (Hoffman, 2003; Preston, 1993, 1997; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). After all, contemporary arguments went, women teachers could best guide children with their nurturing instincts and moral superiority—and their pliability under male administrative authority and lower yearly salaries likewise proved attractive qualifications. With the support, then, of early school reformers like Horace Mann—who characterized women teachers as “more mild and gentle...with stronger parental impulses...[and] of purer morals” than their male counterparts (as cited in Preston, 1993, p. 537)—popular representations of teachers at the time solidified into a consistent type: a woman who loves her pupils, serves them tirelessly despite trying circumstances, and then devotes the rest of her life to her husband and biological children (Cummins, 2009).

With these shifting understandings came dramatic changes in the makeup of the American teaching force. As education historian Nancy Hoffman (2003) described in *Women’s “True” Profession*, only one in ten U.S. teachers was a woman at the beginning of the nineteenth century. By 1920, however, “out of the greatly expanded force of 657,000 public school teachers, 86 percent were women, including almost all teachers in elementary schools” (p. 2). Importantly, this story of the feminization of teaching also parallels the establishment of an emerging—and primarily male—educational administrative bureaucracy (Blackmore, 1993;

Hoffman, 2003; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Built on dominant gender roles, the hierarchical supervisory structures in most urban schools significantly constrained teachers' autonomy in the classroom—and as a rule offered women less compensation for their labor. As Strober and Tyack (1980) explained:

By structuring jobs to take advantage of sex role stereotypes about women's responsiveness to rules and male authority, and men's presumed ability to manage women, urban school boards were able to enhance their ability to control curricula, students and personnel. Male managers in nineteenth-century urban schools regulated the core activities of instruction through standardized promotional examinations on the content of the prescribed curriculum and strict supervision to ensure that teachers were following mandated techniques. Rules were highly prescriptive.... Given this purpose of tight control, women were ideal employees. With few alternative occupations and accustomed to patriarchal authority, they mostly did what their male superiors ordered. Difference of gender provided an important form of social control. (p. 500)

The shift in teaching force demographics also coincided with the emergence what Tyack and Hansot (1982) described as the educational trust—"a small, self-appointed group of experts proposing a 'democratic' revision of studies from the top down" (p. 132). Led by influential academics, researchers, and educational leaders, this "trust" helped to determine:

who could enter occupations, what training and licenses practitioners must have, what knowledge or skills were considered legitimate, and what patterns of behavior were considered 'professional.' (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 135)

Yet, for women educators like Ella Flagg Young, the first woman president of the National Education Association and a superintendent of Chicago Public Schools, "the young men who...wish[ed] to undertake some new line of work, not of instruction, but of investigation" were to be viewed with suspicion (Lagemann, 1997, p. 178).

As Apple (1985) emphasized nearly one hundred years later, Young's suspicions had merit, because—for women teachers—these bureaucratic controls stretched well beyond in-school performance and pedagogy. There were regulations, for instance, about teachers "being

seen with men, about clothes, about makeup, about politics, about money, about nearly all of one's public (and private) life" (p. 467). Likewise, Hoffman (2003) described the common prohibitions female teachers faced against riding in carriages with men, frequenting confectionary shops, and remaining out after eight in the evening.

While analyses of teachers' writing during this period reveals that most women did not openly protest these rules (Hoffman, 2003), it does not follow that women teachers were passive, nor that they uncritically inhabited the non-aspiring, self-sacrificing public mother role touted by reformers. In her examination of the journals and correspondence of ninety-two nineteenth-century female teachers in New England, for instance, Preston (1993) documented that many of the country's early women teachers were in fact "intellectually motivated and keenly interested in higher wages, improved working conditions, and expanded life opportunities" (p. 542). More directly, teachers like Susan B. Anthony openly protested male dominance in education leadership positions and teachers' professional associations. At an 1853 teachers' conference, for instance, Anthony boldly interrupted a debate about why teachers were not generally esteemed as professionals. Taking the floor before her male colleagues, she offered the following:

It seems to me, gentlemen, that none of you quite comprehend the cause of the disrespect of which you complain. Do you not see that so long as society says a woman is incompetent to be a lawyer, minister or doctor, but has ample ability to be a teacher, that every man of you who chooses that profession tacitly acknowledges that he has no more brains than a woman? ... Would you exalt your profession, exalt those who labor with you. (as cited in Tyack & Hansot, 1982, pp. 64-65)

While teacher resistance and acquiescence assumed multiple and complex forms throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—as it continues to today—Clifford (1981) made special note of the many women who began their careers in the classroom but went

on to participate in women's organizations and the suffrage and abolitionist movements. Indeed, as Hoffman (2003) pointed out, the impressive "roll call of feminist and abolitionist teachers" included, among others, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Amelia Bloomer, Clara Barton, and Dorothea Dix (p. 46). While many teachers deliberately distanced themselves from the high-profile work of the suffragists, it was nonetheless clear that many possessed a remarkable sense of agency that helped them challenge the status quo and fight for improved working conditions. New York City, for instance, witnessed the rise of the 14,000-member Interborough Association of Women Teachers, which successfully challenged gender-based pay disparities in the first decade of the new century, and in Chicago at this same time, Margaret Haley helped organize women elementary school teachers despite her branding by male administrators and reformers as a "fiend in petticoats" (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 186). All of these women's efforts to improve and take some control over their working conditions, however, were met with sharp resistance, and—as the "impressive roll call" of feminist teachers also suggests—many women made the decision to leave teaching in order to pursue other goals.

Like mothering, teaching—"a sacred calling for sacred women" (Rousmaniere, 1994, p. 50)—was perceived as *more* than a job, and teachers who resisted or complained were often critiqued as selfish, unpatriotic, unprofessional, or lazy. While, on the one hand, then, teachers were expected to address complex social and educational problems with unlimited energy, creativity, and enthusiasm, they were required, on the other, to passively accept regulation, intensification of their work, and sub-par conditions from superiors who "knew better" in a complex bureaucracy (Rousmaniere, 1997).

Unfortunately, as I will describe further below, these contradictory and unsustainable expectations of teachers continue to inform popular understandings of teaching as well as

professional conceptions of the role—despite the fact that both men and women now serve as teachers. Indeed, many now argue that the hierarchical system of supervision, prescription, and control described earlier in this chapter can be directly linked to longstanding conceptualizations of teaching as women’s work (Apple, 1983, 1985; Higgins, 2011; Ogren, 2011; Strober & Tyack, 1980; Tyack & Hansot, 1982), and that these influences retain great power if left unexamined (Hargreaves, 2000). By exploring students’ understandings of how, if at all, teacher “self” could and should inform teachers’ work and practice, my study simultaneously considered how these longstanding traditions of control may limit teachers’ efforts to help and reach struggling students.

This Historical Inheritance Writ Large: Self-less “Ideals” for Teacher Practice

In what could be seen as a direct outgrowth of the complicated inheritance of teaching as women’s work, contemporary representations of good teachers in both popular culture and the professional literature involve versions of *selflessness* which apply equally to men and women, and which may stem from this gendered history of controlling teacher’s work. Below, I describe two such traditions—the contradictory ideals of the *objective, professional* teacher and the *caring, altruistic* teacher—and discuss how these representations challenge the idea of bringing “self” to teaching in different ways. For example, by demanding that good teachers either (a) *withhold* or (b) *subvert* their own feelings, thoughts, or needs in order to *best* perform their duties, these “ideals” constrain teachers’ work-lives as they seek to guide and inform practice—just as they have for more than a century. As I describe further below, these narratives challenge teachers in conflicting ways and stand in sharp contrast to the kinds of “self-ful” teaching (Higgins, 2011, p.2) that students in my pilot study described as most helpful and important.

Teacher professionalism: A *holding back* of self. In many ways, the idea of acting “professionally” may ultimately be a double-edged sword for teachers. While, on the one hand, the word “professional” conjures images of success and respect, Shapiro (2010) described the danger inherent in the mythos of the “super-human,” professional teacher—or the teacher who knows all the answers, has eyes in back of his or her head, and remains clinical and objective at all times (p. 613). This ideal, Shapiro (2010) further explained, has deep roots, extending back to the emphases on management and efficiency that characterized early administrative and bureaucratic leadership in education. Yet, this ideal automatically puts a great distance between students and teachers, she warned—a distance student participants in my pilot study expressly resented. Drawing on the sociological work of Willard Waller as an example, Shapiro (2010) noted:

As early as 1932, Waller was discussing the ‘model teacher’ ...[and] depicted what he saw as an inevitable distance between teacher and student, heightened by the perception each has of the other. Students, he says, can never truly ‘know’ their teacher, because they only ‘peer’ at him or her ‘through institutional bars’ (pp. 279, 280). This social distance between teacher and others is necessary, he argued, for the maintenance of institutional authority, so that education can be effective. Waller admitted fully that this distance extends beyond the classroom, creating a ‘thin but impenetrable veil that comes between the teacher and all other human beings’ (p. 49). Hence, the ‘model teacher,’ in Waller’s depiction, is an almost mythical creature set apart, distinct within society, and devoted solely to the cause of pedagogy. (p. 618)

More recently, others like Hargreaves (2001) and Godon’ (2004) recognized in this version of professionalism a distancing scientism that can potentially interfere with teachers’ work. Despite what Hargreaves (2001) recognized as the need for “close emotional understanding” (p. 1069) between teachers and students, the professional ideal of objective detachment compels teachers to *hold back* in these relationships—to “deny or hide a large part of their emotional identity from students” and other colleagues (Shapiro, 2010, p. 618; Golby, 1996; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003).

Linking back to the idea of teacher control, many scholars (Apple, 1983, 1986; Hargreaves 1992, 1994; Naylor & Shaeffer, 2003; Dibbon, 2004) have likewise connected the idea of teacher “professionalism” with the *intensification* of teachers’ workloads and responsibilities. In particular, Apple’s (1983, 1986) intensification thesis warns that the mounting dependence on externally generated curriculum materials and objectives, and on high-stakes assessment and accountability instruments—while ostensibly claiming to authorize and empower teachers’ professional competencies—nonetheless leaves teachers with “more and more...to be done” and “less and less...time to do it” (1986, p. 164). Drawing from a broader labor systems analysis perspective, this view of professionalism warns that many of the same tools teachers have been handed to manage and analyze their work deliberately block out and limit opportunities for more creative efforts, and simultaneously deskill practice by distancing curricular conception from execution (Apple, 1983). As Apple (1983) explained:

Intensification ‘represents one of the most tangible ways in which the work privileges of educational workers are eroded’ (Larson, 1980, p. 166). It has many symptoms from the trivial to the more complex—from no time at all to even go to the bathroom, have a cup of coffee, or relax, to having a total absence of time to keep up with one’s field. We can see intensification most visibly in mental labor in the chronic sense of work overload that has escalated over time. (p. 617-18)

Similarly, Apple (1983) argued, such rationalization and proletarianization (his term for this form of intensification) of teacher’s work can be directly linked to longstanding conceptualizations of teaching as women’s work:

A striking conclusion is evident from the analyses of proletarianization. In every occupational category, women are more apt to be proletarianized than men. This could be because of sexist practices of recruitment and promotion, the general tendency to care less about the conditions under which women labor, the way capital has historically colonized patriarchal relations, and so on. Whatever the reason, it is clear that a given position may be more or less proletarianized depending on its relationship to the sexual division of labor. (p. 612)

Nearly a decade after Apple’s argument, and nearly a decade before the increased administrative and accountability tasks ushered in by the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002, Hargreaves (1992) found evidence that teachers’ descriptions of their work-lives were highly compatible with the idea of intensification—even in schools with otherwise favourable working conditions and financial resources. Given the punitive measures of many current accountability reforms, and the dire economic situation for schools across the country, it is no wide stretch to argue that teachers today may feel similarly overtaxed and overloaded.

Given, too, that the increased pressures of bureaucratic regulation can, of necessity, push teachers away from the more emotional, interpersonal elements of their jobs, intensification may likewise serve to “make the job of masking and maintaining emotional distance easier” (Hargreaves, 2001, p. 1069)—a reaction that fosters the ideal of professionalism but simultaneously makes the work of teaching and learning more difficult. For instance, former teachers have shared with me in an educational podcast interview that “doing the minimum” and keeping *themselves* out of the classroom was an occasional but necessary defense in an “unnatural” and hostile system, as it was “just not worth getting your heart broken everyday,” as one teacher put it (Your Permanent Record?, 2010a). This idea was similarly presented by Greene (1978), who explained:

The problem is that, confronted with structural and political pressures, many teachers (even effectual ones) cope by becoming merely efficient, by functioning compliantly—like Kafkaesque clerks. There are many who protect themselves by remaining basically uninvolved. (p. 27)

As I will describe in greater detail in this and future chapters (i.e., Chapters 6 and 8), the student participants I learned from *directly* mentioned this defensive distance as a significant barrier to their learning and engagement.

The selfless teacher: Teaching as altruism and care work. In a parallel yet largely incompatible tradition, good teaching is often *also* represented as a form of selfless service to others (Baldacci, 2006; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; England, 2005; Higgins, 2003, 2011). Consistent with the early rhetoric surrounding the feminization of teaching, and paralleling many other professions traditionally classified as “women’s work” (e.g., social work, nursing, the librarianship), teaching in this representation fundamentally involves sacrificing one’s own needs in order to serve the needs of others—all for the honor and intrinsic reward of doing good. Indeed, as Higgins (2011) argued, in teaching just as in the other “so-called helping professions, deprivation can become a badge of honour” (p. 8). Difficult working conditions, lower pay, and intense regulation of one’s work, then, become obstacles to be tirelessly endured rather than fought, and—just as with Apple’s (1983) intensification thesis—it seems no coincidence that the “helping professions” are defined almost entirely along gender lines. As Higgins (2011) pointed out:

Architects and lawyers and veterinarians all help their clients too, and all experience so-called ‘intrinsic rewards.’ And yet in these cases this does not exclude their receiving ample ‘extrinsic’ rewards of money, autonomy and recognition; nor are we tempted to call them ‘helping professions.’ Thus, what leads us to label teaching, nursing and social work as ‘helping professions’ does not seem to be that they offer help to others but that they refuse to help themselves in the process. (p. 8)

Indeed, as I discussed in the section on the feminization of teaching, new teachers at the turn of the century entered the field awash in rhetoric of highly moral and maternal service, and similar stereotypes of the selfless teacher have pervaded popular culture and film since the 1930s (Edelman, 1983). Even today, teachers are called to give of themselves thanklessly and serve and sacrifice for the benefit of others. As a recent New York City Teaching Fellows Program recruitment poster demonstrated, it is still the norm to ask of potential teachers, “You’ve made

your own dreams come true. Isn't it time you started on someone else's?" (as cited by Higgins, 2011, p.1). Of course, there is both irony and danger in such an altruistic ideal, for this particular breed of asceticism—in which teachers distance themselves from their own growth and desires in the name of serving others—leaves many teachers with the unpleasant choice between “putting aside self-interest in the name of duty, or conversely putting aside teaching in the name of self-interest” (Higgins, 2011, p. 154). Ultimately, this may not be much of a choice at all, for as Heron (1994) noted, “[p]eople who suppress their own inner life prompts in order to serve others, end up doing things which damp down the inner life energies of those they profess to serve” (<http://www.human-inquiry.com/lwta.htm>).

As a number of students shared with me in my pilot study, the person who fills the role of teacher mattered immensely to their understandings of good teaching—and in light of this important preliminary finding, I further explored the role of *teacher identity* in student constructions of good teachers in my dissertation.

My 2009 Pilot Study: Methodology and Key Learnings

As I described in Chapter 1, as a teacher and school leader in alternative school environments, I found myself struggling to make sense of competing pressures and demands as I worked to support students as well as colleagues. Convinced that a deeper understanding of what *students themselves* needed most from their teachers and schools would help me find a way through these challenges, I searched (unsuccessfully) as a practitioner for literature about alternative school students' perceptions of good teaching—rather than take for granted what my school organization, the state, and the educational climate told me students like mine needed to succeed. More specifically, I hoped at the time to expand my knowledge of student perspectives

beyond my own experience and context, and this driving interest continues to inspire my work and research interests.

For example, and as I also mentioned previously, I conducted a pilot study in the spring of 2009 exploring how 5 students in one new alternative high school program in a New York suburb described, understood, and experienced “good teaching.” Like my dissertation research, my pilot study addressed a gap in the literature (please see Chapter 1 for a fuller discussion), as extant studies of at-risk students’ perceptions of their teachers relied extensively on quantitative surveys, very small samples, or studies of foreign programs (e.g., Foley, 2009; Moreira, 2002; Poyrazli, Ferrer-Wreder, Meister, Forthun, Coatsworth & Grahame, 2008; Reich, 1996; Saunders & Saunders, 2001; Ulrika, 2008).

Because findings from my pilot directly informed my dissertation research, I provide below an overview of my pilot study methodology and a summary of key learnings.

Pilot Study Methodology

Data for my pilot study included 6 hours of in-depth semi-structured interviews (5 hours of interviews with students, and 1 60-minute interview with a teacher), 40 hours of observations, and 1 hour of student focus group discussion. In the paragraphs that follow, I briefly highlight key characteristics of my participants and my data collection strategy. A crosswalk of methodological strategies is also presented below, in Table 1.

Table 1

Crosswalk of Pilot Methodological Strategies

Research Questions	Data Collection Strategies					Sample Questions from Interview Protocol
	Observation	Conversational Data	Individual Interview	Focus Group	Document Analysis	
How do students in this alternative educational setting make sense of and define “good teaching”?		X	X	X		- Describe a teacher you particularly admire. What was special about this person? - Describe the lesson or activity you most enjoyed. What did you like about it?
<i>Sub-Question: How do diverse students respond to this question?</i>		X	X	X		
Which, if any, teaching styles/practices do alternative education students deem effective?	X	X	X	X		- Unfiltered, off the top of your head, what types of things about school or teachers do you find really helpful? - If you were a part of the teacher hiring committee, what types of things would you look for in a candidate?
<i>Sub-Question: How, if at all, do student perceptions accord with those of their teachers?</i>		X	X		X	

Site selection. Ten potential sites were identified for the pilot study through internet research and word-of-mouth reputation. Programs in and around the metropolitan New York area serving “at-risk” secondary students (grades 8-12) met the selection criteria, as I hoped to gather and interpret the perspectives of a diverse range of struggling learners. I left introductory phone messages at two sites, and began contact and access procedures after one assistant principal returned my call. This site, a small, newer program in a suburban New York area, operated as a school-within-a-school, and focused on serving students in the district who were struggling to succeed in the traditional high school.

Participants. At the beginning of the study, 18 students were enrolled in the program, one joined partway through, and another prospective student “shadowed” for one half-day. All

students were observed multiple times in multiple settings and five students participated in a focus group that preceded the interviews (discussed below). Four different students volunteered for individual, in-depth qualitative interviews after I presented the purpose and nature of my study in a short, whole-program presentation, and one focus group participant offered an additional interview towards the end of the study, bringing the total of student interviews to five. Four teachers provided unstructured, conversational data, as did the program's part-time Teaching Aide, the Assistant Principal, a district Financial Officer, and one district Assistant Superintendent. The program's lead teacher (an unofficial designation for the program's full-time staff member) provided a more formal interview on the final day of the pilot study. I spoke with all of these adults primarily to help build relationships and trust as a guest of the school—and also to better understand the fabric of the program (i.e., I did not have a specific research question around teachers, but I was eager to learn from them and get to know them more informally).

Four of the five interviewed students were male, and all ranged from 15 to 17 years old (grades 9 to 11). Three were Caucasian, and two were Latino. Moreover, the participants opted into the program for different reasons (i.e., personal choice, parental decision, counselor/teacher recommendation). Because the program was in its first year, all participants were relative newcomers to the alternative school environment, and I have only anecdotal information about participants' socio-economic backgrounds. As an additional note, while the pilot focus group (also described below) was a helpful experience that generated interesting data, it was largely a result of "convenience sampling" (Maxwell, 2005; Berg, 2009), as one teacher volunteered his class to accommodate scheduling concerns.

Observations. In the Spring of 2009, I observed at the site for five full days, one half-day, and two shorter, administrative visits concerning program information and access specifics. A total of 40 hours were spent at the site. During these visits, 14 individual classes were observed, including multiple sessions of English, Science, Math, History, and Psychology. I observed students in seven different teachers' classes, and was able to visit each class more than once. Social interactions (student-student and student-staff), before and after school times, karate class, and non-instructional activities (such as morning arrival, the breaks between classes, lunch, dismissal, and one field trip) were also observed.

Document analysis. Archival data was limited, as an examination of student disciplinary or academic records was beyond the scope of the study. However, I was able to review school-created program literature (i.e., informational brochures, school signage, website information) and one newspaper story about the program to establish the on-the-record mission and purpose of the school.

Focus group. Prior to conducting any interviews, I facilitated a focus group during a morning Psychology class. The event was pre-arranged with the instructor, and timed to accord with an appropriate instructional hiatus. The class size likewise seemed ideal, as 8 students (aged 13-15) were enrolled in the class, although 3 were absent the day of the focus group (for a total of 5). Through both discussions and free-writes, students shared their thinking and feeling about good teachers—and what makes them different or special.

Student interviews. Semi-structured interviews with student participants primarily concerned their prior and current experiences in schools and with teachers, with particular emphasis on their definitions of good teaching. These interviews were conducted at the school facility during school hours, in available staff offices.

Summary of Key Pilot Findings

In this section, I synthesize the sharings of the student participants in my pilot study in order to paint a portrait of good teachers as they described them. While not every participant mentioned every point below, all of these ideas emerged directly from the pilot study data, and the voices of all five students who were interviewed are represented in this synthesis. In later sections of this chapter, I quote directly from the pilot interviews to help illuminate participants' thinking and to connect their ideas to themes informing my dissertation and research questions.

Synthesis of most important pilot learnings. Perhaps most importantly, my pilot study helped illuminate the essential role that human connection played in these student participants' understandings of good teachers. Indeed, for the five students who participated in interviews, good teaching was about more than the successful transmission and reception of information, and went much deeper than a teacher's content knowledge or approach to any given teaching activity. Rather, participants' sharings evoked the importance of attending to contextual, intra-, and interpersonal dynamics—to “the people who are with you” and “most of your environment” as one participant explained.

Indeed, according to many of these participants, good teachers kept “people” central to their work. They recognized students as unique and valuable individuals—despite their occasional resistance, attempts to disappear, and “tests” of teacher authority—and accepted students for *who they were*. Good teachers never made students feel anonymous, invisible, or inconsequential. They recognized their pain, insecurities, and strengths both in and out of the classroom without assumption, and accommodated student growth with both supports and challenges. In other words, they recognized who and where students were, and willingly met them there, regardless.

Similarly, participants explained that good teachers brought their *own* unique selfhoods into teaching. By authentically modeling curiosity, interest, and learning, good teachers broke through student disinterest or distraction with a delicate balance of schoolwork and fun, of structure and flexible caring. Comfortable showing their “real” selves—including interests, feelings, out-of-school connections, and even frustrations—good teachers felt more like family members, calling to mind both the unconditional love and occasional blemishes inherent in the best of close relationships. Never robotic, by-route, or artificial, good teachers *embodied* their work without going through the motions, and did so in ways recognizable to participants, as they could “just tell.” Without “hiding” behind fear or apprehensions, good teachers engaged students directly, respectfully, and authentically—mistakes and all—and challenged students to do the same.

At the heart of things, then, the pilot findings suggested that—for the study participants—good teaching involved the authentic, reciprocal interaction of student *and* teacher selves, and the willingness of all participants to “see” others for “who they were,” and to risk being seen themselves. By demonstrating authentic interest and modeling the vulnerability essential to meaningful learning, good teachers created comfortable spaces for students to explore, question, and express their own identities, rather than simply “fade away.”

As I describe in further detail below, these findings also helped illuminate the concept of *authenticity* as a powerful lens for expanding dominant conceptions of good teachers—and for helping teachers, school leaders, teacher educators, and other educational stakeholders to think about teaching and learning in new and different ways. While, to my knowledge, the concept has not yet been studied within the K-12 context, Dirkx (2006) succinctly summarized authenticity as it is currently discussed in the higher education literature: “the self of the teacher is at the heart of good teaching” (p. 29). Involving both learning *and* development, students *and*

teachers, and self *and* others, authentic teaching recognizes learning as intensely personal and holistic, and as intimately bound with the process of becoming for all participants. Cranton (2001), a prominent advocate for authenticity in higher education, similarly described the authentic teacher as a practitioner who merges self and teacher—and who brings one’s whole self into the classroom and student relationships.

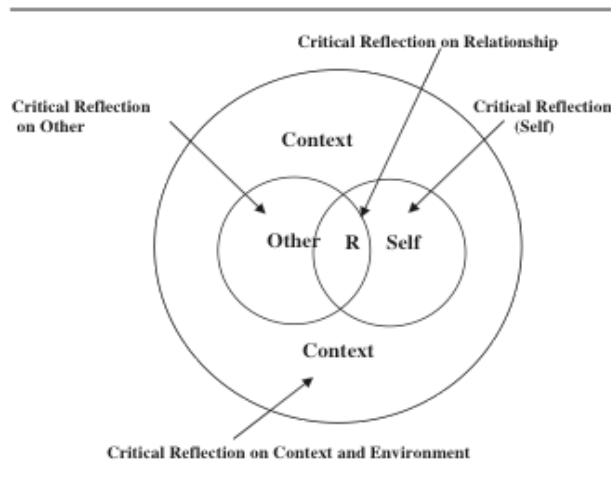
Importantly, the five-part authenticity framework Cranton established with Carusetta (2004)—a grounded theory model that grew from research with university professors about their teaching in higher education—accords in large measure with the ideas described by pilot study participants, and serves consequently as a useful framework for exploring the concept in alternative high schools. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I present an overview of the study from which this framework was derived, and then use aspects of the study’s five dimensions to pull together and synthesize my pilot study findings and relevant, interdisciplinary bodies of work from the at-risk and K-12 contexts. This discussion weaves together diverse empirical and theoretical literatures that inform my research questions—and, I hope, suggests the promise of further exploring how, if at all, Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004) model might apply in a new context (i.e., alternative schools) and from a new perspective (i.e. students’ instead of teachers’).

Cranton & Carusetta (2004): A Promising Framework for Extension

Using a qualitative, grounded theory approach in their 2004 *Adult Education Quarterly* article, “Perspectives on Authenticity in Teaching,” Cranton and Carusetta examined the thinking and teaching of twenty-two (22) faculty members from three different Canadian universities over a period of three years. Representing numerous disciplines, such as business administration, philosophy, computer science, education, and forestry, the faculty were sampled to include both men and women, and both more experienced (i.e., 3 or more years of experience)

and new (i.e., 1-2 years experience) scholars with diverse academic backgrounds as equitably as possible. Identified by peers and administrators as “authentic teachers” (although the term was deliberately left open to interpretation) (p. 9), the twenty-two (22) participants were interviewed once per semester during years 1 and 2 of the study, observed once during the latter part of the first year, and once per semester the following year (n=2). The study continued for a third year, in which the participants discussed preliminary findings—including themes “related to self-awareness, relationships with students, learning environments, being inauthentic, power, critical reflection, and changes in practice” (p. 11)—with the research team in small focus groups of 4-6.

Through their analyses, Cranton and Carusetta (2004) established five dimensions of authenticity as manifested in practice and understood by participants, including awareness of: 1) self, 2) others (i.e., students), 3) relationships with learners, 4) context, and 5) a critically reflective approach. Conceptualizing the faculty as “adult learners engaged in developmental and potentially transformative activities” (p. 5), Cranton and Carusetta (2004) acknowledged the importance of recognizing students’ unique individualities and needs—but also emphasized the deliberate, reflective learning and self-knowledge of faculty as an essential counterweight. A cooperative, synergistic endeavor, authentic teaching involves the interaction of authentic selves, in authentic contexts that honor and integrate selfhood in the expectations, content, and norms of the learning environment. In this conceptualization, represented in Figure 1 below, a teacher’s critical reflections serve as glue and bedrock for the authentic classroom:



*Figure 1: A model of authentic teaching. From “Perspectives on Authenticity in Teaching,” by P. Cranton and E. Carusetta, 2004, *Adult Education Quarterly*, 55, p. 20.*

Moving forward, it is important to note that this particular study focused exclusively on teachers in higher education, and only those in the Canadian context. While the study considered the evolution of authentic teaching over time (i.e., over three years of observed practice and in relation to participants’ career stages [Cranton & Carusetta, 2004b]), it did not explicitly take into account the age or cultural backgrounds of participants. Nevertheless, my careful literature review of ideas compatible with authentic teaching in the K-12 context—with a particular focus on at-risk students—revealed the striking promise of the framework, as I discuss in the following sections.

As I hope will be clear, despite authentic teaching’s current home in the adult learning world, compatible ideas of student and teacher identity (and the relationship between the two) in K-12 education have been discussed for some time, albeit separately—and the parallels are particularly striking in relation to the literature on teaching at-risk students.

Authentic Teachers “Out of Context”: The Potential for Extending a Model of Authentic Teaching to Alternative Schools

In this section, I use key dimensions of Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004) framework to organize and synthesize diverse bodies of literature that informed my research. In particular, these ideas drove my third research question, which asked how, if at all, the authentic teaching framework might inform or be informed by learnings from students in alternative high school programs. Because I presented important aspects of context earlier in this chapter (e.g., historical understandings and constructions of teaching), and also in Chapter 1 when providing the context for alternative schools, I focus specifically below on the dimensions of *student-teacher relationships*, *learner identity*, and *teacher “self”* to further highlight my pilot study findings, and also to weave together different bodies of relevant literature from the K-12 and at-risk contexts that align with the authentic teaching framework. Moreover, because the idea of a *critically reflective approach*, as described by Cranton and Carusetta (2004), applies most directly to teachers’ perspectives and practice—rather than students’—I’ve embedded a brief discussion about this dimension under teacher “self” and identity. I conclude this section by highlighting the deep and interdisciplinary roots of ideas that run parallel to the authentic teaching framework.

Both independently and collectively, then, these bodies of work informed my plans to test and build theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Maxwell, 1992, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) about authentic teachers as described by alternative high school students. I begin, first, with a discussion of the importance of student-teacher relationships in the K-12 and at-risk contexts.

The Importance of Student-Teacher Relationships

It is well-established that teaching is fundamentally relational and interpersonal (Chaskin & Rauner, 1995, as cited by Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Mayeroff, 1990; Noddings, 1984, 2005),

and that attending to affective dynamics in classrooms and student-teacher relationships is key to successful teaching and learning (Drago-Severson, 2009; Goodenow, 1993; Kegan, 1994; National Research Council, 2004; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003)—especially for lower-performing students (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). As described earlier, alternative schools have been widely distinguished by their organizational and pedagogical emphases on community, interpersonal relationships, and reciprocal care, and it is a long-standing developmental finding that students need to care about or feel cared for by at least one adult in school (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1986; Thompson, 1998). As Thompson (1998) explained, “The most powerful weapon available to secondary teachers who want to foster a favorable learning climate is a positive relationship with...students” (p. 6). That being said, it has been demonstrated that *all* teachers engage in at least 200-300 significant interpersonal interactions each hour (for better or for worse) (City et al., 2009; Jackson, 1990), and, looking at the literature, it seems clear that so much of what matters to students about teaching involves the complex and feeling-filled nuances of being in relationship, or what Maxine Greene calls “an I meeting an I” (2010).

For example, a substantial body of research (e.g., Faircloth, 2009; Ryan, Sillter & Lynch, 1994; Wentzel, 1997, 1998) confirms the positive association between students’ perceptions of interpersonal relationships at school and their engagement and academic achievement, and these findings have been replicated in both ethnically diverse and more homogeneous settings (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Similarly, using data from the large-scale National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health in the United States, Crosnoe, Johnson, and Elder (2004) found positive student-teacher relationships to be associated with behavioral engagement at the high school level. For teachers, too, positive relationships with students rank as critical components of their work. Both new teachers (McNally, Blake & Reid, 2009) and

teachers of at-risk students (Scribner, 2003), for example, expressly convey the complexity and importance of student-teacher relationships when describing successful elements of their practice, and, from a psychological perspective, this emphasis on student relatedness and belonging aligns with wider understandings of motivation and commitment (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Vallerand, Fortier & Guay, 1997).

For a majority of the students in my pilot study, the ability to *connect* similarly emerged as a defining quality of good teachers. As one student shared with me, “the characteristics that make a great teacher are someone you could actually relate to, you know? Somebody you could have a real conversation with.” Other students described their connection to good teachers as more “like a family”—in which just “being together” felt comfortable and enjoyable. In light of these learnings, and the related literature above, “student-teacher relationships” was one theoretical category that informed data analysis in my dissertation research.

Seeing “Others”: Acknowledging Student Identity

A second category for theory building and testing that emerged from my findings, accorded with the authentic teaching framework (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004), *and* pointed to parallel literatures in the field was the importance of acknowledging student identity—or *seeing* students beyond superficial categories and classifications. In at-risk educational contexts and in all teaching and learning environments, honoring student identity is a well-established priority (Johnston & Nicholls, 1995). Moreover, research suggests that learners of all kinds are most motivated when invited to contribute some voice or agency to their learning and work (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Levin, 2000; Vallerand, Fortier & Guay, 1997). For the students in my pilot study, the feeling and experience of *being seen* by teachers emerged as a particularly important element of good teaching. In contrast, feeling invisible or anonymous emerged as the reverse. Resentful

of feeling overlooked throughout much of his educational career, for instance, one student explained to me that most teachers “just stare at you and you’re basically just another face in the group.” Referencing the large class photos that students take each year, lined up in long rows, this student further explained: “You know how they, like, take those big pictures of everybody – like 9th graders? That’s pretty much it. You’re just one of the faces.” After continually experiencing and eventually *coming to expect* this type of disregard, this student withdrew from learning and from his teachers: “I didn’t like the teachers,” he confided, “’cause I knew that they were just gonna treat me like I was nothing.”

Writing further about the authentic teaching framework described above, Cranton (2006) explained the importance of recognizing and valuing individual learners in a follow-up piece to her original study:

When teachers do not see students as individual people, authentic relationships are not possible. In educational systems and within the culture of institutions, there are often socially constructed notions of what students are like: ‘students cannot read and write anymore,’ ‘today’s students are lazy,’ and ‘students are only interested in getting jobs.’ An uncritical acceptance of these social norms leads educators to define the persona of ‘student’ and then use this persona to form rules about how students behave. If the habitual expectations about how students behave are critically questioned, it is possible for teachers to transform their perspective on students until it becomes multifaceted and open to the differences among the human beings who are their learners. (p. 8)

While, again, Cranton’s (2006) insights referred to teaching in higher education, research in the K-12 context similarly points to the importance of authentically recognizing learner identity. We know, for instance, that adolescents regularly—and sadly—receive different treatment based on race, gender, social class, ability, and appearance, and we know that teacher attitudes and behaviors can serve to either redress or perpetuate such inequalities (Certo, Cauley & Chafin, 2003; Foster, 2008). Also, reporting on a number of studies conducted in the 1970s, Galbo (1986) documented that teachers were chosen *last* by adolescents when asked to describe adults

who understood them best—and that teachers’ understandings of adolescents were often considerably different than students’ own self-perceptions. More recent research likewise confirmed that some teachers lack knowledge about the issues adolescents consider most important to their lives—and suggested, too, that many teachers remain *un*interested in increasing their understandings of adolescents’ identities (Adamson & Meister, 2005).

As I describe in more detail below, educational scholars and researchers in the K-12 context have recognized the need to truly care for and honor student identity for some time. For example, in his 1966 work, *The Authentic Teacher*, Moustakas argued that students must be nurtured and encouraged as unique, whole individuals—even in the midst of strict time limits, prescribed curricula, and discrete subject-area activities. As he explained, despite the compartmentalizations and pressures of traditional schooling, each child brings his or her whole self to each divided activity, and must be welcomed and recognized accordingly. After all, a teacher would be hard pressed to create opportunities for a student’s growth if he or she rejects or misunderstands that child (Moustakas, 1959), or if that child’s life beyond the classroom was of no import to the teacher. Buber (1947) likewise recognized the importance of holistically and genuinely *seeing* students in his philosophical essay, “Between Man and Man”:

[T]he genuine educator does not merely consider individual functions of his pupil, as one intending to teach him only to know or to be capable of certain definite things; but his concern is always the person as a whole, both in the actuality in which he lives before you now and in his possibilities, what he can become. (p. 132)

Such holism may be particularly important in our current climate of high-stakes testing—in which individuals and groups are regularly assessed, labeled, and promoted on the basis of test scores and academic performance. Writing on the hazards of over-utilizing I.Q. testing in education more than forty years ago, Greene (1967) offered a similar and foreshadowing caution.

“A particular child’s personality and promise,” she wrote, “are not encompassed when [I.Q.] is the category used” (p. 85). Given the back-to-basics, cookie-cutter curricula most commonly used in high-needs secondary contexts (Lehr & Lange, 2003; Spillane, Diamond, Walker, Halverson, & Jita, 2001), and the strong weight currently placed on measurable outcomes when constructing understandings of both students and teachers, the need to recognize and honor student selfhood in the K-12 sector is all the more urgent and timely.

While, as I explained, the importance of acknowledging student identity informed the lens I brought to my dissertation research, below I describe the ways in which this focus has influenced pedagogical and curricular paradigms in the K-12 context both historically and contemporarily—in order to highlight key parallels and promising connections to students’ sharings.

Curricular connections.

The next person who encourages me not to write in the first person gets left back.
– Them, “Eating Homework”

While awareness of learner selfhood in the K-12 literature involves a call to look beyond limited definitions and measurements of student worth, it also involves adapting the formal curriculum to meet student needs, capacities, and interests. Such a student-centered pedagogical focus—which echoes ideas proposed throughout the twentieth century in progressive, humanist, and constructivist educational paradigms (Cornelius-White, 2007; Cuban, 1993; Dewey, 1938; Kliebard, 2004; Tyack & Cuban, 1995)—has been a core focus of many approaches to instructional improvement (including many alternative school designs), and has been linked to improved affective and academic outcomes for a diverse range of students (Cornelius-White, 2007).

Numerous studies have demonstrated, for instance, the promise of authentic tasks that

invite real-world and student-life connections (Certo, Cauley & Chafin, 2003; Newmann, Marks & Gamoran, 1995, 1996). Likewise, in a meta-analysis synthesizing 119 studies of student-centered teaching conducted in English and German from 1948 to 2004, Cornelius-White (2007) identified honoring student voices in classroom activities and decision-making, as well as adapting to students' individual and cultural differences, as effective teacher practices for supporting belonging and growth. Taken together, this analysis measured the effects of student-centered pedagogy involving approximately 355,325 students, 14,851 teachers, and 2,439 diverse schools in the United States, the Philippines, Brazil, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Increasingly, research suggests that pedagogy that encourages intrinsic interest, and that supports autonomous learner engagement by offering choice and meaningful rationales for activities (Niemic & Ryan, 2009) yields greater curiosity, independent-mastery, and feelings of self-worth for learners of all types and ages (Deci & Ryan, 2000)—and has been linked more recently with synergistically high thought-processing and test performance in high school students (Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Deci, 2004).

In terms of the at-risk literature, Vallerand, Fortier, and Guay (1997) studied a sample of 4,537 high school students and established a strong correlation between autonomy-supportive educator behaviors and student motivation and persistence in school. Contrastingly, more controlling pedagogical styles were positively related to student decisions to drop-out. In a 1992 study, Deci, Hodges, Pierson, and Tomassone similarly identified the importance of autonomy- and competence-supporting teaching styles in mild to moderate special education settings. For students with diverse learning and emotional challenges, they argued, autonomy-supportive and high-engagement activities helped predict both academic achievement and social adjustment, and stood in sharp contrast to the behavior-modifying, remedial approach most common in special-

needs classrooms (Lehr & Lange, 2003; Spillane et al., 2001). Ultimately, consistent among all of these strategies is the belief that in-class opportunities for students to explore their own interests, values, and aspirations improve the conditions for teaching and learning.

This idea was also expressed clearly by students in my pilot study. One participant, for instance, suggested that good teachers “make it [learning] as easy as possible on the student” by “find[ing] out their likes and dislikes and try[ing] to map out something [to teach] around them.” As I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 5, my dissertation participants similarly offered rich descriptions of the ways good teachers accounted for student identity in their practice.

Links with psychological understandings of student identity.

[E]very child needs to be noticed, to be known.
– Max van Manen (2002)

Given our understandings of the central role of identity development in the lives of adolescents (Erikson, 1968, 1980; Faircloth, 2009; Marcia, 1980; Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006), it is perhaps unsurprising that students would both value and respond to teachers that recognize who they are and who they are becoming in both their teaching and their relationships with students. Still, there is a growing awareness and concern that teachers and schools do not adequately acknowledge the different “selves” students bring to schools everyday. Capturing the essence of this worry, Faircloth (2009) explained:

[I]dentities are [typically] constructed for, rather than by students [in schools and classrooms]. Unfortunately, such definitions are often arbitrary when compared to the individual characteristics of students that inhabit today’s schools and often systematically label or exclude students who do not meet the school’s uniform expectations. (p. 326)

While the disconnect between a student’s personal sense of identity and the identity expectations imposed by teachers in school has been shown to lead to frustration, anxiety, and disengagement for students (Faircloth, 2009; Foster, 2008; Rubin, 2007), it is also true that the structural

organization of many traditional secondary schools exacerbates this problem for adolescents (Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan & MacIver, 1993; Goodenow, 1993).

Unfortunately, there has been a long history of blaming students for this disconnect. Since the cultural deficit arguments of the 1960s, educators and social scientists have located the causes of school failure within individual students or the characteristics of different cultural groups (Foster, 2008; Rubin, 2007). Instead of incorporating and accommodating the lived realities of students' emerging identities, the bureaucracy of modern schooling frequently addresses this gap with a litany of labels, classifications, and tracking decisions. Still, as Faircloth (2009) asserted, it is often "this gap rather than [students'] intelligence, skills, or abilities that must be reconciled in order for them to succeed in school" (p. 326).

For students, then, successful identity development involves the integration of multiple—and sometimes competing—aspects of self into "a sense of personal sameness and continuity across time and context" (Faircloth, 2009, p. 325), and includes "forming an image of oneself (personal integration), finding oneself in relation to others (interpersonal interaction) and making educational and vocational life choices (societal integration)" (Adamson & Meister, 2005, p. 347). Considering that much of an adolescent's time is spent in school (recent estimates put the average student in school for 32.5 hours per week) (Swanbrow, 2004), and also that adult-adolescent interactions are critical to adolescent identity development (Adamson & Meister, 2005), teachers are poised as potentially potent supports in this fundamental journey. As Erikson recognized (Muuss, 1995), identity development is a *social* task requiring interaction with others, and so the import of student-teacher relationships may reach far beyond traditional measures of academic success and failure.

Teacher as “Self”: Representations in the Literature and Possible Extensions

The third dimension of Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004) framework, awareness of the teacher “self,” similarly helped to frame and illuminate a number of my pilot study findings—and also led me to emerging bodies of literature in the K-12 context about the importance of teacher identity, development, and reflective practice. As such, this third dimension informed my dissertation research as well as my efforts to test and build theory about how alternative high school students described, understood, and experienced good teachers. More specifically, while all of the dimensions of the authentic teaching framework accorded in important ways with findings from my pilot study and the literature presented above, pilot participants’ sharings about how good teachers brought their “real” selves into their work suggested a particularly rich avenue for exploration and contribution to the field.

We know, for instance, that teachers’ emotions and feelings (Hargreaves, 2000b; Nias, 1996; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003), cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Carter & Goodwin, 1994; Goodwin, 1997), and sense of efficacy and autonomy (Henson, 2001; Kennedy & Sammy, 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001, 2007) can relate to teaching behaviors as well as student outcomes. We know, too, that teachers who are more confident in their abilities are often more open to trying new methods (Milner, 2002), and that they generally exhibit higher levels of planning and organizational skill (Milner & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2003). Similarly, including teachers in decision-making processes and recognizing their autonomy fosters higher levels of job commitment and satisfaction (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988; Lee & Smith, 1993; Rowan, 1990). However, as I describe in greater detail below and as I suggested earlier in this chapter when I overviewed traditional approaches to defining, evaluating, and thinking about good teachers, the

“self” of the teacher is often appreciated most *for what it can do for others*, rather than an essential dimension of teaching and learning *in and of itself*.

Even the growing push towards reflective practice—which links to Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004) emphasis on a critically reflective approach and puts the teacher self at the center of effective professional development—positions the teacher self as something to be studied, refined, and improved *in order to better serve students*. While this tradition, which I describe further below, offers many important avenues for improving teaching and learning, my pilot study findings (and also a podcast interview I hosted with three New York City high school students about good teachers) suggested that students may be asking for something *more* when it comes to teacher selfhood. As I have already suggested, this is one aspect of the authentic teaching framework that I was eager to explore further and expand in my dissertation research.

Links to reflective practice. With roots in the work of Dewey (1910, 1916), and popularized in large part by the work of Schön (1983, 1987, 1991, 1996, as cited by Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007), reflective practice is an experiential learning method most commonly associated with the refinement of professional practice. Generally, reflective practice involves “stepping back from an experience to ponder, carefully and persistently, its meaning to the self through the development of inferences” (Daudelien, 2000, p. 301). Often triggered by “a disjuncture between what is expected and what occurs” (Marsick, 2009), this type of deliberate perspective taking, or reflection-on-action, can also be accompanied by more indirect forms of knowing, such as reflection-in-action—which involves intuitive, in-the-moment adjustments to practice—and/or knowing-in-action, which refers to the tacit expertise professionals demonstrate without conscious recognition (Merriam et al., 2007). Depending upon their individual beliefs and values, practitioners frequently have different orientations toward reflective practice

(Hagger, Burn, Mutton & Brindley, 2008; Hughes, 2009; Marcos, Miguel, & Tillema, 2009; Merriam et al., 2007; Ng & Tan, 2009), which holds important implications for its increasing use in schools.

For example, reflective practice is more and more becoming an integral component of teacher development strategies (e.g., Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hawley & Valli, 2000; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; York-Barr, Sommers, Ghore, & Montie, 2006). Advocated as “a powerful norm required for continuous improvement of teaching and learning practices that results in high levels of student achievement” by York-Barr et al. (2006, p. 1), reflective practice has received much attention from education scholars, teacher educators, school leaders, and practitioners—and serves as both complement and contrast to more traditional, technical professional development opportunities. For example, within the past 25 years, reflective practice has been adopted as a standard for teachers by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1987), the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996), the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (1996), and the National Staff Development Council (now Learning Forward) (1995) (as cited by Rodgers, 2002).

In part, this call for reflectivity responds to the increasingly complex demands of teaching and leading in contemporary society (Lohman, 2000; York-Barr et al., 2006). Operating with what Glickman (1988) characterized as “knowledge but not certainty” (as cited by York-Barr et al., 2006, p. 63), teachers must regularly struggle to meet the adaptive challenges (Heifetz, 1994) of the modern classroom, or what Schön (1987) described as “those unfamiliar situations where the problem is not initially clear and there is no obvious fit between the characteristics of the situation and the available body of theories and techniques” (p. 34). As Hargreaves (1992)

explained, the scope and intensity of such ambiguity is only exacerbated by the heightened emotional, social, and learning difficulties present in most at-risk teaching environments.

In many ways, reflective practice is situated to address this complexity more effectively than traditional, skill-based professional development and preparation programs, which rely primarily on hierarchical knowledge transmission and technical ideals of best practice (York-Barr et al., 2006). Contrastingly, reflective practitioners emphasize self-recognition, self-knowledge, and synthesis as active managers of their own learning (Dirkx & Lavin, 2001; McGlenn, 2003). Nevertheless, recent research reveals significant variation in teachers' reflective abilities (Hughes, 2009; Marcos, Miguel, & Tillema, 2009; McGlenn, 2003; Ng & Tan, 2009). Marcos, Miguel, and Tillema (2009), for instance, warned that reflective practice may not be adopted as intended, and pointed out that—in much of the literature—the “what” of reflective practice is given much more attention than the “how.” Indeed, reflective practice in schools encompasses a wide range of intentions and outcomes. From the action-oriented to the meaning-oriented (Marsick, 2009), the critical to the superficial (Hughes, 2009), and the immediate to the long-term (Ng & Tan, 2009), reflection means different things to different people, and it may only be the slim minority (<10%) that are currently capable of doing it well on their own (Butler et al., 2004, as cited by Marcos, Miguel, & Tillema 2009).

Growing teacher selves: Something more than service? In addition to these complications, the common endgame of reflective practice—“continuous improvement of teaching and learning practices *that results in high levels of student achievement*” (emphasis added, York-Barr et al., 2006, p.1)—also leaves dangling the larger question of how teachers themselves can fill and be fulfilled by their roles, an important element of how students in my pilot study described good teachers. While service to students is of course a top priority for

teachers and other educational stakeholders, this overarching focus on teacher self-awareness *in order to serve others* echoes emphases on altruism and care work that pervade many constructions of the profession.

As I discussed earlier in the section on “the selfless teacher,” and as the teacher attrition statistics confirm, teachers need and deserve something more. Nationally, for instance, 15% of new teachers leave within their first year of teaching, 30% leave within 3 years, and 40-50% leave within 5 years (Ingersoll, 2002; Smith & Ingersoll, 2003). Similarly, 15% of teachers change schools each year looking for improved working conditions (Smith & Ingersoll, 2003), and the Alliance for Excellent Education (2005) estimated that, system-wide, such large-scale attrition costs upwards of 4.9 billion dollars per year (as cited by Johnson et al., 2009).

Inarguably, there are many factors that influence teachers’ decisions to remain in or leave the classroom (Johnson, 2006; Baldacci, 2006), but it remains the case that teachers are increasingly asked to do more for less—that they face increased pressures, mandates, regulations, and controls in their work—and that these pressures can have dire results for both teachers and students. As Niemiec and Ryan (2009) explained, describing the importance of preserving teachers’ sense of agency and autonomy:

[T]he pressures toward specified outcomes found today in so many educational settings promotes teachers’ reliance on extrinsically focused strategies that crowd out more effective, interesting, and inspiring teaching practices that would otherwise be implemented. Thus, to the extent that administrators and policy makers fail to consider the motivation of *both teachers and students alike*, and instead rely on controlling contingencies to produce ‘accountability,’ the more *all those involved in the learning process* will suffer decrements in motivation and learning outcomes. (p. 140, emphasis added)

Perhaps one of the most compelling findings that bubbled up from my pilot study was the fact that the students I learned from explicitly named unique selfhood as a defining characteristic of their best teachers. As one student participant described, there was simply “something

special” about her favorite teacher, an elusive quality that helped her learn and grow as a student. “It’s just her personality,” she shared, “her light.” Indeed, as I described earlier, while the students wanted to be seen and cared for *themselves* as individuals, their emphasis on genuine regard was not a one-way street. As this same student shared, a good teacher is “someone who’d care for us...[but good teachers also] give out this feeling where we could, like, love ‘em back, I could say.” This sense that really seeing and knowing one’s teacher as a person was an essential part of the teaching and learning experience for students was further reiterated by three high school students I interviewed during a podcast I hosted about good teaching. As one student shared with me, who was a rising senior in New York City at the time of our conversation, his favorite teacher was incredibly effective because of his authentic presence. As he put it: “When he [the teacher] steps into the room, you know it’s him, and it’s a good feeling to have.”

Conversely, students in my pilot study shared that the *holding back of self* associated with more “professional” ideals of teaching (as previously discussed) likewise limit opportunities for genuine connection and learning. As one student shared of his experiences with many teachers over the years:

[I]t feels like they’re hiding...and then you never get to know them... They’re hiding themselves so, like, they can make themselves more like—you’ll be either scared of ‘em or respect them a little bit more and never bother to really show their real self.

Inarguably, a teacher’s reluctance to show his or her “real self” in the classroom can have complex and multifaceted roots, and understanding how to better support teachers in their journey toward becoming more authentic is one possible outgrowth of my dissertation research. Still, for the students I learned from, the perceived distance between *who a teacher is as a person* and *what he or she does in the classroom* can have significant implications for students’ learning. As another student shared with me during my podcast interview:

I believe that most of the teachers that are quote-unquote boring...have two different lives. They'll have a teacher life and they have their personal life. I think once you put your life and your career as a teacher and you put them together, that's what makes you a good teacher. Like bring that into the classroom. That will help your students learn more. It might make the students more interested in the class.

As I describe in the final sections of this chapter, the importance of acknowledging teacher selfhood as a counterweight and complement to student identity has deep and interdisciplinary roots. Below, I discuss longstanding and parallel traditions in education and related fields that raise up ideas like those presented throughout this chapter, and which accordingly suggest the promise of expanding the authentic teaching framework as a guide to teaching in alternative high school contexts and in educational environments more broadly.

Longstanding Parallels to Authentic Teaching: A Tradition in Perspective

Be yourself, everyone else is taken.
– Oscar Wilde

Running parallel to and just below the surface of more quantitative constructions of teaching, there has always been a tradition of education as human connection and becoming—a tradition that likewise informed my exploration of participants' understandings of the complex interrelationship between student and teacher selves. For example, just as courageous teachers continue to push back on restrictive quantifications of their work (Apple, 1985; Hoffman, 2003; Ogren, 2011; Tyack & Hansot, 1982), so too do the deep roots of the profession—which extend back more than 2,000 years to the early teachings of both Socrates and Confucius—remind us that teaching has always been intensely personal and holistic on many levels (Hansen, 1995, 2001, 2011). Jackson (1986), for instance, documented the existence of two competing traditions within teaching, the mimetic and the transformative, which he argued reach back deeply into the human past. Offering a concise summary of Jackson's (1986) thesis, Hansen (2001) shared the following:

The former [the mimetic] captures the long-held view that teaching means transferring knowledge to the young.... Jackson argues that method takes on a supreme importance in this tradition, because teachers have to figure out how to transmit the knowledge and also how to be sure the young have absorbed it. In contrast, teachers in the transformative tradition seek to do something other than just transfer knowledge. They hope to transform students as persons (and possibly themselves as well).... They ask questions, they express wonder and doubt, they offer themselves as role models for how students might conduct themselves ethically and rationally through the vicissitudes of life. Jackson suggests that both of these traditions remain viable today, although their popularity waxes and wanes. Moreover, he tells us, their coexistence creates tensions and difficulties for teachers who attempt to be mindful of both. (p. 133)

Indeed, despite what Giroux (1985) dubbed the “developing trend toward the disempowerment of teachers” (p. 206), and also the emergence of “teacher-proof” curricula in the latter half of the twentieth century (Remillard, 1999), a careful look back at alternative conceptions of teaching over the past century and beyond helps highlight the importance of teacher selfhood as a vital counterweight to student-centered paradigms and more technical approaches to teaching and learning. In response to what he considered the “extremism” of excessively child-centered classrooms, for instance, Dewey (1938) offered this sharp warning:

That children are individuals whose freedom should be respected while the more mature person should have no freedom as an individual is an idea too absurd to require refutation. The tendency to exclude the teacher from a positive and leading share in the direction of the activities of the communities of which he is a member is another instance of reaction from one extreme to another. (pp. 58-59)

This idea that a teacher’s “freedom” should inform pedagogy in ways both respectful and incorporative of students has likewise been championed by a number of contemporary scholars (e.g., Hansen, 2001b; Higgins, 2011; Fenstermacher, 1999; van Manen, 1986, 1994). From this view, “self-ful” teaching (Higgins, 2011, p.2)—or teaching that honors the perspectives, expertise, and experiences of teachers—involves truly recognizing and valuing the *person* who fills the role of teacher.

In a similar vein, the importance of fully nurturing and developing teachers as a support to student learning was championed in the work of Buber (1947), who argued that, “Only in his whole being, in all his spontaneity can the educator truly affect the whole being of his pupil.” Educating others, he explained, requires “a man [or woman] who is wholly alive and able to communicate himself directly” (p. 134), and this need is particularly key when working with “frightened and disappointed” adolescents. As he explained:

When the pupil's confidence has been won, his resistance against being educated gives way to a singular happening: he accepts the educator as a person. He feels he may trust this man, that this man is not making a business out of him, but is taking part in his life, accepting him before desiring to influence him. And so he learns to ask. (p. 135)

Moustakas (1959) similarly argued that “a teacher must be freely himself to free others to be” (p. 127), and again, he particularly emphasized the importance of teacher selfhood when working with struggling, disaffected learners:

Every teacher faces the disturbing problem of helping unhappy, dissatisfied children to find a positive way of living in the classroom. Every teacher must in some way meet the variety of emotions that children bring with them to school. How the teacher does this depends on the type of person he is and what he believes. (p. 21)

Joining the chorus of voices challenging mainstream understandings of teaching and schooling, Greene (1978) likewise connected the personal journeys and transformations of teachers with those of their students. Good teaching, she argued, “can only be done if teachers can identify themselves as moral beings, concerned with defining their own life purposes in a way that arouses others to do the same” (p. 51). As these far from exhaustive examples help to show, the role that individual teachers play as human beings in the fundamental work of teaching and learning remains fertile ground for reflection and future study (Hansen, 1993, 1995, 2001, 2011).

In fact, as Hansen (2001) put it, this may actually be “the ground that teachers and those who care about teaching have to keep clearing away and tending” (p. 16).

Additional interdisciplinary connections. In addition to the connections to authentic teaching already discussed above and in the higher education literature (e.g., Cranton, 2001, 2006; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Dirkx, 2006), it is also important to note that parallel emphases on developing, nurturing, renewing, and honoring *selfhood* can be found in the literature of educational leadership (e.g., Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002; Burns, 1978; Drago-Severson 2004, 2009, 2012; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013); humanistic psychology (e.g., Maslow, 1943; Moustakas, 1961, 1986, 1995); developmental psychology (e.g., Kegan, 1982, 1984, 2000; Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012); and self-determination theory (e.g., Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Moreover, both classical and contemporary philosophers have recognized individual identity and personhood as central to our most fundamental understandings of ourselves and our world—and, while not directly discussed in the authentic teaching framework or literature—these ideas serve to further support the notion that selfhood, for all participants, is an essential and promise-filled element of teaching and learning. As Faircloth (2009) explained, an individual’s evolving understanding of personal identity remains “the most proximally and powerfully positioned context of human experience” (p. 326)—and as such informs nearly every aspect of daily life, as well as students’ relationships to *what is* and *what might be* in classrooms and their learning.

Taylor (1989), for instance, recognized the concept of “self” as the defining narrative of our age. The United States, for example, like much of the Western world, has been associated with a “rugged individualism,” and the nation’s founders—like many of their contemporaries—evinced a concern for both individual rights and self-knowledge. In 1750, for example,

Benjamin Franklin offered the following maxim: “There are three things that are extremely hard: steel, a diamond, and to know one’s self.” Beyond political understandings of selfhood, however, a deeper look at philosophical ideas about self-realization and personal identity helps illuminate how such a seemingly private focus nevertheless resonates with both educative and social significance (Hansen, 2001).

Confucius’ principle of “humaneness,” for example, fuses the concepts of both “person” and “two,” and reminds us that personal identity also and always involves intimate understandings of inter-subjectivity and relationality (Hansen, 2011). After all, *who we are* sits inextricably in relation to the wider constellation of values, cultures, structures, individuals and groups with whom we share our lives, and growing oneself in this system also and ultimately contributes to the larger whole in ways both big and small. Kant (1795), for instance, helped highlight that no two people are interchangeable, and that there remains something unique and irreducible about all human beings that brings value and dignity to their work and connections (Hansen, 2001b). From this perspective, it might not be hyperbolic to argue, as did Hansen (1995), that “an individual thinking about becoming a teacher may...have something to offer that nobody else can provide—even if the person may not appreciate (as yet) what that ‘something’ might turn out to be” (p. 11).

In my research, I sought to test and explore the potential contributions that teachers could make to students—and themselves—by bringing their own unique gifts, talents, perspectives, and *selves* into their work in authentic ways. I discuss these and related ideas more directly in the chapters that follow.

Conclusion: A Promising Lens for Learning

I think teachers should try to find their own way to make everything work for them, not try to find what you read or what you heard about one other teacher because it might not work for you.

– Henri, rising senior, Harlem NYC

While many questions remain about the applicability of Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) authentic teaching framework to the alternative education context and to the K-12 environment in general, my research introduces a new perspective about this promising model by highlighting the ways that nineteen (19) alternative high school students' ideas and insights about good teachers enhanced this conceptualization. As Sergiovanni (1994) recognized, the language we use to orient ourselves to educational endeavors may significantly impact the ways we conceive of *both* questions and answers, and—as I will describe throughout this dissertation—the concept of authentic teaching was indeed a powerful guide for my research and analysis, and it also holds promise for thinking and talking about education in new (and old) ways.

Given the complex, multifaceted, and at times contradictory mandates, pressures, and expectations placed on teachers—especially those serving the highest-needs students—and also the organizational logic that task should drive structure (Riehl, 2009), a closer understanding of what feels most important and helpful to a group of students in the current system holds important implications for teachers, teacher educators, educational leaders, and policy makers working to make schools more authentic places of learning. As we search for new solutions to old problems, and for ways to *reform* the substance and “stuff” of our classrooms, might we not also imagine how students' wisdom and the enduring traditions of connection in education could help *transform* and revitalize the best of what teachers know and do? Indeed, a research-based model of authentic teaching in alternative education environments could prove an important complement to traditional, quantitative measures of teacher quality and effectiveness, and could

help illuminate how the “who” of teaching stands in important relation to the “what” and the “how” of classroom practice. As J. S. Mills recognized more than 125 years ago, skills, training, and knowledge are important—*essential*—to any complex endeavor, yet we all need freedom within the structures and systems that direct us. As he put it:

Nobody denies that people should be taught and trained...to know and benefit by the ascertained results of human experience. But it is a privilege and proper condition of a human being to use and interpret experience in his own way. It is for him to find out what part of recorded experience is properly applicable to his own circumstances and character. (cited by Moustakas, 1994, p. 94)

While not a step-by-step blueprint or a technical mandate, then, authenticity suggests that—for all participants in the educational arena—selfhood is a process of becoming more than a fixed entity, and a goal rather than a prescription. Just as students “are to be educated so that they may create themselves” (Greene, 1967b, p. 4), so too must teachers nurture their own developing capacities—a process inarguably both disquieting and liberating. Looking forward, is it not our greatest responsibility to ask ourselves and our systems how we might better accommodate and support students in our high-pressure, high-stakes school environments? For that matter, since we cannot reduce education to a simple technical model, how might the standardized, hierarchical approaches to teaching gaining favor restrict or impede the complex, non-routine aspects of teachers’ work that students and history suggest are key to the profession? It is my hope that my research contributes to these discussions, and serves also as a jumping-off point for future study and investigation.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I describe my methodological approach to investigating how nineteen (19) students in two alternative high schools described, understood, and experienced good teachers. I begin with an overview of my research questions and my rationale for selecting a qualitative approach. I then discuss the criteria that guided site and participant selection, as well as the strategies I employed for data collection and analysis. I conclude by describing how I attended to validity threats, including researcher bias, reactivity, and descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity.

Research Questions

As described in Chapter 1, my research explored how nineteen (19) alternative high school students described, understood, and experienced good teachers in order to build grounded theory derived from their experiences and to test and potentially extend existing theory (Maxwell, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Towards this end, my research was guided by three main questions:

1. How do nineteen (19) students in two alternative education settings describe, understand and experience good teachers?
2. Regardless of context, subject matter, or grade level, what, if anything, stands out as most important to these students about good teachers? Supportive? Effective?
3. How, if at all, might Cranton & Carusetta's (2004) framework for authentic teaching inform or be informed by these students' perspectives? The alternative education context?

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

One driving intellectual goal of a qualitative study is to understand meaning making (Maxwell, 2005). Given my aim to more deeply understand students' personal thinking about and experiences with good teachers, both within and across two sites, a qualitative methodology was most appropriate—and also served to address a gap in the literature, as I described in Chapter 1. Moreover, because I was interested in more deeply exploring the nuances of students' understandings of good teachers—including feelings, stories, insights, and reflections—my research questions called for in-depth, conversational responses that could not be gathered through a survey instrument or other quantitative measures.

While, in some ways, this is a departure from the measurable outcomes focus that drives many current reforms and initiatives, it is also true that such an approach constitutes a *return* of sorts to the roots of educational research. As Lagemann (1997) pointed out, for instance, some of the earliest educational research conducted in our country was in fact *conversational* in nature. A full fifty years before the emergence of the quantitative paradigms that reflected the country's turn-of-the-century faith in positivistic science, for example, educator and theologian Bronson Alcott “undertook experiments in radical person-centered education at private schools that directly prefigured the non-traditional movement” (Alcott Center for Educational Research, 2007, <http://alcottcer.blogspot.com/2007/10/who-was-amos-bronson-alcott.html>). Captured most memorably in his *Conversations With Children on the Gospels* (1836–1837), his approach underscored that systematically talking with and listening to youth about their experiences could generate new kinds of knowledge infused with social meaning and significance. My approach similarly involved talking with and listening to students in order to explore my research

questions and generate new knowledge about how participants described, understood, and experienced good teachers.

The Influence of Phenomenology

Informed by phenomenological thinking and research, which recognize the “value of returning to the self to discover the nature and meaning of things as they appear and in their essence” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26), my study sought to both test and build theory in light of participants’ sharings and reflections about good teachers. In particular, this paradigm expressly informed the texture and spirit of my second research question, as I was interested in distilling what, if anything, felt most important to participants about good teachers—regardless of context, subject, or grade level taught. Linked to the phenomenological search for “essence,” which Husserl (1969), Moustakas (1994), and van Manen (1990) defined as the commonly-shared condition or quality of an experience which makes that experience *what it is* (cited by Cilesiz, 2009), my research *sought out* participant subjectivity, description, and interpretation, and recognized as valuable the a priori, intuitive aspects of knowing and knowledge that individuals brought to the research experience (Cilesiz, 2009; Rotman, 2006). This emphasis on what is *felt*, *lived*, and *experienced* as true and important—in complement to those things that can be measured, quantified, or assessed—was particularly fitting for a study exploring students’ subjective experiences of good teachers, and offers a new perspective to the ongoing debate about what constitutes a good teacher.

A Dual-Site Case Study Approach

To my knowledge, the limited qualitative research on at-risk (i.e., struggling or underperforming) students’ perceptions of good teachers and/or the alternative education context relies primarily on single-site data (e.g., Foley, 2009; Watson, 2011). In addition, other

researchers have relied on quantitative survey measures to explore alternative school students' perspectives (e.g., Poyrazli, Ferrer-Wreder, Meister, Forthun, Coatsworth & Grahame, 2008; Saunders & Saunders, 2001). In contrast, my dissertation research sought to learn about a wider range of alternative high school students' lived experiences with and understandings of good teachers, and accordingly drew from a *dual* case study design (Yin, 2009) to explore questions of process and sense-making within and across selected contexts. In keeping with this design, I learned from students in two different alternative programs, Ellis Academy and Civis High School, in order look across sites and individual cases. Such an approach allowed for more robust data for comparison and for theory building/testing (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009) in relation to the authentic teaching framework (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004).

Next, I explain my methodological decisions regarding the selection of sites. In keeping with the qualitative tradition, I employed purposeful sampling in order to select sites that aligned with criteria to maximize learning (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990).

Site Selection

The careful selection of research sites was critical to achieving the goals of my research study. As I will describe in greater detail below, my selection of sites was guided by each program's (1) enrollment philosophy (i.e., how and why students enroll), (2) size, (3) accessibility (i.e., the school was willing to allow me to be present over a series of months to learn from students and staff), and (4) location (i.e., proximity). Below, I list the four criteria I used for selecting the two sites. In order to obtain and provide "important information that cannot be gotten as well from others" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 70), each alternative school or program in my study:

1. Operated as a program of choice for students who were struggling or underperforming in mainstream environments (i.e., students enrolled freely by personal or parental choice, and were not mandated to attend by the school, district, state, or judicial system).
2. Enrolled at least 15 students in the program.
3. Permitted prolonged researcher engagement.

Also, given my plan for prolonged engagement, it was important that the sites were each:

4. Geographically accessible to the researcher.

The first criteria—that each alternative school operated as a program of choice—stemmed from research findings that at-risk students who freely attend alternative schools (i.e., by their own or parental choice) show an overall increase in self-esteem, motivation, interpersonal relationships, and academic performance (e.g., Cox, Davidson, & Bynum, 1995; Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Gold & Mann, 1984; May & Copeland, 1998; Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006; Smith, Gregory, & Pugh, 1981 as all cited by Lehr et al., 2009; Watson, 2011). Similarly, the growing concern that students—especially those with disabilities or emotional and behavioral challenges—may be forced out of mainstream high schools by “forced choice” alternatives (Lehr et al., 2009) made these mandated programs less appropriate for my study purposes and goals.

The second criteria—a minimum enrollment of 15 students—related to my goal of learning from at least 16 students across the two programs. In order to maximize my chances of recruiting enough students to the study (i.e., 8-10 from each school), it was important that the schools I selected enrolled a large enough number of students to make this possible.

Both the third and the fourth criteria involved accessibility and feasibility of different kinds. Because I was interested in conducting this research over the course of months, it was essential that the schools welcomed and allowed my prolonged engagement. Similarly, although

I did not have specific research questions around this, my plan was to informally learn from the adults in school as well (to better understand the fabric of the program), so their comfort and cooperation were also important considerations. Relatedly, because my study involved repeated and extended visits, it was important that these schools or programs be within reasonable distance (i.e., within driving range of my Long Island home base). Because of this, I selected two schools, Ellis Academy and Civis High School, that were in inner-ring suburbs of New York City. I describe these sites in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Next, I describe my process for finding and inviting students to participate.

Participant Selection

While I wanted, ideally, to learn from a diverse sample of students at each alternative high school program, participants were selected on a *volunteer* basis—because it was of the utmost importance to me that students felt comfortable and wanted to participate. Also, because the participants at each site *already* attended alternative schools or programs (i.e., they met this most important criteria), the remaining selection criteria for my sample were simply that these students: (a) willingly volunteered to participate in this study, and (b) agreed to participate in 2 interviews and 1 focus group. While the number of student volunteers I was able to recruit ultimately determined the total number of participants in my study, my goal was to learn from 16-20 students (8-10 from each school). Ultimately, as I will describe in Chapter 4, I was fortunate to learn from nineteen (19) students who volunteered to take part in this research. Moreover, as I will also discuss further in the next chapter, while my sample included more participants from Ellis Academy (n=13) than Civis High School (n=6), this disparity was proportional to the different sizes of the schools themselves. Similarly, while it worked out that participants were diverse in terms of age, grade, gender, race, and duration of enrollment in the

alternative program (as well as many other factors, as I describe in the next chapter), I offered *all* students in both programs the opportunity to participate, regardless of demographic factors, so as not to exclude the voices of students who wanted to contribute.

In terms of my process for inviting students to participate, after securing access and permission from the school leaders at each site to conduct this research, I presented my research goals and plans—as well as my background as a former alternative school teacher and leader—to the students and staff of each program. At both sites, I visited individual classrooms—accompanied by a staff member who introduced me to students—and described my study, my hopes for learning, the time commitment involved, confidentiality measures, and the procedure for volunteering (including returning informed consent forms signed by a parent or guardian). I also offered students multiple opportunities to ask questions, either during these classroom visits or more informally afterwards in the hallways or common areas. In addition to this, staff at both sites supported my research by distributing copies of my informed consent forms (the principal at Ellis mailed forms directly to parents, and the school psychologist at Civis sent out an email notice to the school’s parent group with my forms as an attachment). Students volunteered for the study on a rolling basis, and turned in forms either directly to me or to staff members at their schools. Consent and research description forms can be found in Appendices E and F.

Data Collection

In this section, I describe the ways I collected data in order to answer my three research questions. In light of the potential challenges of working with and interviewing adolescents in the research process (Eder & Fingerson, 2002; Bassett, Beagan, Ristovski-Slijepcevic & Chapman, 2008)—including the importance of establishing rapport, and also intentionally scaffolding reflective opportunities—I also describe in this section my three main strategies for

collecting data, including: (1) caring for participant comfort and trust through prolonged site engagement and observations, (2) conducting individual interviews that invited and respected participants' experiences, and (3) checking back in with participants in focus groups to help understand and extend their thinking and reflection.

Observations & Document Analysis

In order to help built trust and rapport with both the students and staff at my sites, I visited each site twice per week for approximately three months (from December 2012 to February 2013). Over this period, I spent a total of 140 hours at the sites, split nearly evenly across both programs. While I did not specifically have a research question requiring observational data, my intention behind investing this much time at each site involved establishing a familiar and comfortable presence, learning more about each of the contexts, and getting to know the students and teachers (who graciously shared their classrooms and students with me). During these visits, I observed in numerous classes (e.g., multiple periods of English, mathematics, social studies, science, art) and also spent time with students and staff during lunch, free periods, and transition times (i.e., between classes). I was also fortunate to attend multiple whole-program meetings and events at Ellis Academy and two school-wide field trips at Civis High School that helped me to become more familiar to and with the programs, participants, staff, and other students.

Additionally, I collected and analyzed site-related media or literature (e.g., newspaper articles about the programs, informational brochures, school websites, archival records of school meetings, classroom handouts and assignments) to maximize my familiarity with the context. Such an understanding, and the extensive field notes I was able to take, informed my interview probes, and also served to improve the quality of my data as the researcher-participant

relationship is especially important when working with adolescents (Eder & Fingerson, 2002; Bassett, Beagan, Ristovski-Slijepcevic & Chapman, 2008). My continued presence may have also minimized threats related to reactivity (Maxwell, 2005).

The importance of relationships. The need “to form at least a minimum quantity of affectively positive connections within one’s context” (Faircloth, 2009, p. 322) rests as a central human need, and one that feels especially critical to many adolescents given the cognitive and social changes that can lead to feelings of exposure and vulnerability at this time (Elkind, 1967; Goodenow, 1993). Research has recognized the importance of trusting adult-adolescent relationships when working with teenage students both formally and informally (Galbo, 1988; Simpson & Galbo, 1986), and, given the personal nature of the interview process, it was important to build both trust and rapport with students before and during the interviews. Indeed, connecting with adolescents around interests of importance to them can help teachers, researchers, and other adults better understand student perspectives—and gain trust in return (Galbo, 1986, 1988). Accordingly, prior to beginning my interviews, I spent approximately two weeks at each site (i.e., four visits) in order to establish initial connections with participants and build rapport more generally. As indicated in my protocols (Appendices A and B), interviews were also opportunities for participants to ask questions about the study and/or me, personally.

Semi-Structured Qualitative Student Interviews

The primary data for my study came from 2 semi-structured, qualitative interviews I conducted with each of the nineteen (19) participants, lasting approximately 45 minutes each (approximately 30 total hours of in-depth interview data). Since I conducted these interviews during my site visits—and most typically during students’ lunch, free, or resource room periods—the 45 minute duration was fairly standard, although a few interviews went

significantly over and a few were a bit shorter. While I had originally planned to interview 8-10 students from each site, a greater number of my participants were students at Ellis Academy (n=13), because Ellis had a larger student enrollment than Civis High School (e.g., Ellis served approximately 50 students while Civis served approximately 20). Nevertheless, as I describe below and throughout, analyses reflect findings from participants at both sites.

To shed light on my research questions, the first interview explored participants' past and present educational experiences (including their reasons for enrolling in the alternative school and/or program) and their understandings about the qualities, characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of good teachers (please see Appendix A for Interview 1 protocol). The second interview involved an opportunity to reflect on and expand sharings from the prior interview using the Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, and Decisional Framework (Spencer, 1989; Stanfield, 1997) (please see Appendix B). While interview topics stemmed primarily from my first two research questions (i.e., I did not directly ask students about components of Cranton and Carusetta's [2004] authentic teaching model), I also used conversational interview questions, probes, and follow-ups to make these foci accessible to student participants, and to gather data relevant to my research questions (Maxwell, 2005; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

In terms of timing, I conducted the interviews with participants from both schools on a rolling basis, as they returned the informed consent forms and as their academic schedules allowed. Once participants returned the consent forms, I offered them hard copies of the interview protocols so that they could review the questions and also have a chance to prepare ahead of time if they preferred. Most participants took copies of the questions, although I am unsure about how many reviewed them carefully (I did not ask, as they were provided solely for

participants' benefit and comfort). One participant, however, did provide me with hand-written notes that he jotted down on his handout in preparation for our first interview.

While I conducted most of the first-round interviews before starting the second round, leaving approximately 1 month between each participant's interviews, a few students joined the study later in the process, so their interviews were closer together. In all cases, I reviewed participants' key sharings from the first interview before conducting the second interview in order to get a broader sense of my early findings and to inform follow-up questions and member-checking (Seidman, 2006).

Below, I describe the focus of each interview in more detail.

Interview 1: Introductory discussion and reflection on good teachers. The first interview was an opportunity to strengthen my rapport with student participants and to help them feel more comfortable with the research process (including the dynamics of a recorded conversation with a new adult). Towards this end, I always offered participants snacks and water, and opened with a review of their rights as participants, the process of conducting an interview, and a brief check-in about questions and demographics (e.g., their age, grade level, time spent at the alternative school, etc.). I then invited participants to share a bit more about their experiences in school, prior to their alternative school enrollments, as well as the ways (if any) they felt being in the alternative school had helped with their challenges—with a particular focus on the role of teachers. Learning about their histories and then zooming in on specific experiences with good teachers helped me to contextualize their sharings and also suggested themes for the second interview and focus group. My protocol for this first interview, which is an adaptation of the protocol I used during my pilot study, is presented in Appendix A. While I used this protocol to guide the interview, I also responded to students' courageous and

sometimes painful sharings on a case-by-case basis in order to listen most genuinely and more accurately understand their perspectives.

Interview 2: Scaffolded reflection on good teachers. Like the first interview, the second interview with participants lasted approximately 45 minutes, and was guided by a specific protocol (please see Appendix B). After welcoming participants and offering refreshments, I recapped what I saw as prominent themes and ideas from the first interview and asked each participant to consider these in light of his or her own continued thinking (member-check). The interview then guided participants through a more structured series of reflections on good teachers based on the ORID (Objective-Reflective-Interpretive-Decisional) framework (Spencer, 1989; Stanfield, 1997). As I describe below, this framework helped scaffold careful reflection and also provided comparable data for analysis.

The ORID framework: Collecting observational, reflective, interpretive and decisional data. A structured inquiry tool first presented by Spencer (1989) for the Institute of Cultural Affairs, the ORID (Objective-Reflective-Interpretive-Decisional) framework was designed to capture both the inner and outer worlds of participants' experiences, and aligns with "a natural human process" of experiential learning that brings forth "rational and emotional responses embedded in the lived experience of people" (Watt, Miller, & Kloepfer, 1999, p. 23, cited by Maltbia, 2009). By using this framework, I asked participants to recall *observable* data about a particular experience with a good teacher (i.e., what was said, who was there, what people did), and guided them to layer these accounts with rich *reflective* data such as the feelings, images, moods, and metaphors associated with their understandings of good teachers in general. Likewise, by gently pushing participants to uncover and describe patterns, lessons, and themes evident in their reflections, I was able to better understand and represent their *interpretive*

meaning making processes. Finally, in the *decisional* realm, I asked students about the potential implications of and applications for their understandings. To better clarify the framework, the “quadrants” and associated components are detailed in Table 2 below:

Table 2

Summary of Quadrants in the ORID Framework

1. Observational Facts, observable info (i.e., what was seen, done, said, etc.)	2. Reflective Feelings, emotions, reactions, associations, images (i.e., what it felt and seemed like; internal/external perceptions; metaphors)
4. Decisional Options, plans, goals and ideas for informed action (i.e., what should we do next?)	3. Interpretive Patterns, themes, meanings (i.e., what really matters, deeper priorities)

Ultimately, using this tool in the second interview provided me the structure and flexibility needed to gently probe and support participants’ reflections, and also provided a helpful lens for comparing data across individuals and sites. By tapping into participants’ deeper feelings and meaning-making, the second interview also helped me to address the questions about the “essence” of good teachers that inform my second research question.

Focus Groups

A second important data source for my research were the three focus groups I conducted after completing the second round of interviews (Berg, 2009; Morgan, 1997). Lasting, like the interviews, approximately 45 minutes each, I held two focus groups at Ellis Academy (6-7 students each) and one at Civis High School (with the 6 participants from this site). Because two of the focus groups ran over time slightly, I collected approximately 3 hours of focus group data across both sites.

In terms of assigning students to the focus groups, I built groups in light of students' academic schedules (i.e., when they would be available to meet) as well as their observed interpersonal relationships (i.e., in order to make the groups as safe and comfortable as possible). I conducted the focus groups in late February, 2013 as a type of closing, collaborative reflection, and also as a celebration of participants' contributions. For example, in each session, we talked about my preliminary findings over a pizza lunch and snacks. Guided by the focus group protocol presented in Appendix C, which in turn was informed by my ongoing analysis of data from the first and second interviews (please see Appendix D for the thematic notes and questions I used during the focus group), the groups served as a kind of informal member check—in which participants reacted to, refined, and added to preliminary findings. They also served as an opportunity for participants to extend their thinking in ways that are difficult to do alone (Patton, 2002).

To structure the focus group, I reviewed the process and intention of the group, reminded participants about the importance of confidentiality, and then invited students to reflect privately and collaboratively about important topics and ideas that emerged from the interviews. For example, I shared emerging ideas about what good teachers did, how they made participants feel, and how teachers evinced these qualities through relationships with students. I also invited them to reflect more generally and summatively on their alternative school experiences—and to ask questions of each other and me. Importantly, given the more public space of a focus group, students were asked to contribute only in accordance with their comfort levels (i.e., participants could share ideas out loud, comment on the ideas of others [or not], turn in their reflective notes as a form of contribution, etc.).

Data Analysis

In this section, I describe the methods that I used for data analysis, which I approached as an evolving, systematic process (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). As I describe below in greater detail, data analysis involved a number of iterative steps, including (1) writing analytic notes and memos (Maxwell, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998); (2) transcribing interviews verbatim and reviewing transcripts for accuracy; (3) coding (theoretical and emic/in vivo) (Geertz, 1974; Strauss & Corbin, 1998); (4) categorization (Maxwell & Miller, 1998); (5) crafting narrative summaries (Seidman, 1998, 2006); and (6) building and analyzing within-case and cross-case matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Analytic Notes and Memos

After each day at each site, I reviewed my observation notes and summarized key reflections in relation to my research questions. Likewise, after completing each interview, I reviewed my interview notes and journaled about the big themes shared by each student (e.g., description of characteristics of good teachers), possible connections to other interview participants (similarities and differences, or cross-case analyses), links to my larger research questions, and potential questions for follow-up (Maxwell, 2005). In addition, these analytic notes and memos served as opportunities to pull back the curtain on my own feelings and impressions (as a former alternative school teacher and administrator) in order to remain mindful of and attentive to my assumptions and biases throughout the research process.

Transcribing Interviews and Focus Groups and Reviewing Transcripts for Accuracy

As a second but ongoing step in data analysis, I either transcribed or had transcribed (by hired transcriptionists) each digitally recorded interview and focus group. While most recordings were transcribed professionally, I did transcribe a number of interviews myself—

either to honor the request of a particular participant or to facilitate a faster turn-around time. After creating or receiving the final transcript, I read (and re-read) the transcripts multiple times as I listened to the recorded interviews to help ensure accuracy (i.e., descriptive validity) (Maxwell, 2005; Maxwell & Miller, 1998) and to make sure that nothing that was shared in the interviews was inadvertently misinterpreted.

Preliminary Coding: Emic and Theoretical

Data analysis also involved coding interview transcripts and field notes for central concepts related to my research questions about students' experiences of and with good teachers (Northcutt & McCoy, 2004; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In order to most fully capture students' sharings and perspectives and to explore my research questions, I used both open (emic) and theoretical (etic) codes (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Geertz, 1974) in this process.

In other words, I began coding by carefully reading interview transcripts to identify participants' important and recurring ideas about good teachers. In an iterative and ongoing process, I then marked participants' general and specific sharings about key topics (such as teachers) and coded them as either "helpful" or "unsupportive." Within these broader designations, I also created codes from participants' in vivo and "experience-near" (Geertz, 1974) descriptions (e.g., "cares about students," "ability to connect," "flexible," "need for power"). Next, I layered emerging emic codes with theoretical codes drawn from Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) framework for authentic teaching (e.g., "self," "other," "relationships") and other literatures in order to guide the development of analytic questions (Seidman, 1998, 2006) for focused analysis.

Whenever appropriate, codes of both kinds (emic and etic) were clustered into related categories.

Categorization

As mentioned, after preliminary coding, I clustered related codes into themes or categories in order to help illuminate patterns in the data—particularly around participants’ definitions, understandings, and experiences with good teachers. In addition, and in keeping with my second research question, I was particularly interested in participants’ shared understandings of good teachers that seemed to transcend context, subject, or grade level.

Toward this end, for each participant (when applicable), I grouped emic and etic codes into broad categories such as “Prior School Challenge,” “Alternative Education Context,” “Good Teacher—Description,” and “Good Teacher—Example.” Within these more encompassing categories, I developed sub-categories or themes such as “Social Challenge,” “Academic Challenge,” “Benefit of Alternative School,” “Being Seen by Teacher,” “Seeing Teacher Self,” and “Relationships.” I did this for each participant and for each interview in the series, in order to facilitate within- and cross-case comparisons (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2009). In other words, I did this in order to understand which and how many participants described particular themes and ideas.

Similarly, these emerging categories informed my focus group protocol (i.e., I presented the big themes to participants in each focus group for further reflection, discussion, and revision, as described in Appendices C and D). I repeated the coding and categorization process described above for my analysis of the focus group transcripts.

Crafting Narrative Summaries

After completing the two-interview series and the focus groups, I crafted narrative summaries (Maxwell, 2005) and participant profiles (Seidman, 1998, 2006) for each participant, using both the students' own words and my theoretical interpretations of what they shared (Maxwell & Miller, 1998). Participant profiles included participants' demographic information (e.g., age, grade level, ethnicity), details about their current and prior school enrollments, as well as their thinking about broad and specific categories and themes. During this step, I continued to write analytical and reflective notes in order to document my own progress and thinking (i.e., to keep a running log of how I was making sense of the data at a given time), and to attend to issues of interpretive validity (Maxwell, 2005).

In order to craft profiles and reduce data around what stood out for participants about important ideas, I asked analytic questions to guide this step of analysis. For example, I asked questions such as: "How does this participant describe and make sense of the ways in which feeling seen (or known or understood) connects to his/her understandings of what makes a good teacher?" "How does this participant describe and understand the role of a teacher's self in teaching? To his or her own learning?"

Within-Case and Across-Case Analysis

My final steps of data analysis involved writing summary analytic memos in response to each of my three research questions, and also generating thematic matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994), visual displays (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and concept maps to assist in within- and cross-case analyses. These organizing analytic strategies helped me to uncover connections among salient themes (for each individual, both sites, and the full sample), and to systematically compare patterns of similarities and differences within and across individuals and cases

(Maxwell & Miller, 1998). These strategies also provided me with a structure to help align my findings with my research questions as I began to build and test a grounded-theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) about how these students described, understood, and experienced good teachers in general—and also in relation to Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004) authentic teaching framework.

Importantly, while I used visual displays to organize and compare my findings for and between participants, I do not include these individualized counts and displays here in order to protect participants’ confidentiality. As I will describe in greater detail in Chapter 4, including these micro-level analyses would potentially reveal the identities of students to the teachers or administrators of their programs, given the small sample size and the highly familiar relationships between teachers and participants at the sites. To similarly safeguard confidentiality, I do not link participants’ self-selected pseudonyms with other demographic information (e.g., age, grade level, race, program attended) when describing my findings because, in a number of cases, this would also reveal individual participants’ identities. As I describe in Chapter 4, for example, there was only one ninth grade student in my sample—so linking that information to a pseudonym would make that participant easily identifiable by program faculty.

Additionally, given these confidentiality concerns *and* my overarching intention to explore participants’ ideas about good teachers that transcended context, subject, or grade-level, I primarily present cross-case findings and analyses throughout my dissertation. Indeed, this approach provided an additional layer of buffering and anonymity for participants’ sensitive sharings—and also accorded with my search for what phenomenologists would call the “essence” of good teaching as described by participants. Moreover, while I provide counts for each theme as an indicator of frequency, these counts are not intended to imply that participants

who did not mention particular ideas offered contrary opinions. Rather, because I invited participants to share—with very open prompts (please see Appendices A and B)—the kinds of things they found most helpful and important about teachers without asking about specific categories or ideas, counts simply represent the number of participants who spontaneously mentioned ideas during interviews. All participants’ thoughts and experiences are represented in my analyses.

Validity

Because, as Corbin & Strauss (2008) noted, “[t]he experiences of whoever is engaged in an inquiry are vital to the inquiry and its implicated thought processes” (p. 4), I describe in this section the intentional and systematic ways I sought to maximize validity in relation to both my research design and data analysis. Like Maxwell (2005), and in keeping with the qualitative tradition, I use the term “validity” here to refer to “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p. 106), and do not claim to seek an “objective truth” as suggested by more positivistic interpretations of validity. Below, I describe in detail the ways I attended to researcher bias, reduced reactivity in the field with participants, and cared for descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity.

Researcher Bias

Because, in qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument of data collection and analysis (Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2005), it was of particular importance to consider how my prior experiences and my conceptual framework influenced my research and analysis. While, inarguably, it was impossible to fully escape my own subjectivity as a researcher and a human being, I nonetheless worked to remain mindful (through both reflection and journaling/note taking) about my own preconceptions and assumptions to address researcher bias

(Maxwell, 2005), and to chronicle my evolving thinking about the study over time (Drago-Severson, 2010).

For example, as mentioned in Chapter 1, my experiences as a former teacher and administrator in alternative schools fueled my research questions and my desire to learn from participants in the ways outlined above, and I also came to this research with a conceptual framework based on prior research (Blum, 2009). While I was and am cognizant of these influences, my sincere desire *to really listen to and learn from what students had to say* supported my credibility and integrity as a researcher. For example, and as I shared above, I never asked participants directly about ideas related to the authentic teaching framework during interviews in order to test whether these ideas would bubble up naturally and organically. Similarly, it is important to note here that while I was interested in testing and building theory about students' perceptions and sense-making of authentic teachers in alternative schools, it was *equally* important to me to explore how this emerging theory may *not* relate or fit within this new context or from the new vantage point of participants.

Reactivity

In many ways, attending to reactivity, a second threat to a study's validity, involves not eliminating one's influence as a researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995 as cited by Maxwell, 2005), but better understanding, thinking, and asking about *how* one's presence will inevitably influence the investigation (Maxwell, 2005). In this spirit, my research design incorporated a number of strategies that helped me to address the more undesirable consequences of reactivity. I detail these below.

First, my prolonged engagement at each site helped me to develop more in-depth understandings of the settings, students' perspectives, and student-teacher interactions; collect

richer data; and develop a comfortable rapport with participants (Maxwell, 2005; Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2005). I also publicly acknowledged my past experiences as an alternative educator and made the purposes of my research clear as part of my initial efforts to recruit participants—and included these details as well in the informed consent forms for students and parents at each site. These forms also detailed issues of confidentiality (please see Appendices E and F).

Likewise, I hope that my experiences working closely with at-risk adolescents over nearly a decade served to help participants feel at ease during observations, interviews, and focus groups, and—as indicated in my protocols—I also invited students to ask questions about me and/or the research at the start and end of the interviews and focus groups. In all of these ways, I carefully considered how my identity, experience, and presence served to shape positive, safe, and honest conditions for exploring my research questions with students.

Descriptive Validity

In order to attend to descriptive validity—or the accuracy of what was seen and heard during the study (Maxwell, 1992, 2005)—all interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim (Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2005; Maxwell, 2005). Also, as I shared in the data analysis section, I reviewed all transcripts carefully to ensure accuracy.

In addition, collecting multiple forms of data (i.e., from interviews, observations, and focus groups) allowed for triangulation of data (Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2005).

Interpretive Validity

My use of emic and “experience-near” (Geertz, 1974) language in coding and repeated member checking helped me attend to issues of interpretive validity, or the accuracy of my

interpretations of participants' meaning-making (Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2005; Maxwell, 1992, 2005).

More specifically, checking back in with participants (i.e., member checking) about big ideas, my interpretations of them, and themes (as part of both the second interview and the focus groups) provided opportunities to member check my analyses (interpretations) to confirm or disconfirm their accuracy and applicability and also to incorporate participants' interpretations (Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2005). As Maxwell (2005) noted, respondent validation "is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on" (p. 111), and thus was an important and imbedded part of my research design.

Theoretical Validity

Given my third research question (which involved how, if at all, learnings from this research could inform or be informed by Cranton and Carusetta's [2004] model of authentic teaching) and my desire to both test and build theory in relation to participants' understandings and experiences with good teachers (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), I took careful measures to attend to theoretical validity, or the extent to which my research and learnings fit or did not fit the lens I brought to this work. In particular, I examined the data for both "confirming" and "disconfirming" instances of themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 216) and discrepant data (Maxwell, 1992, 2005; Yin, 2009).

For example, as I will discuss in Chapter 6, I carefully documented participants' reflections about how a teacher's "self" could be a strength or a limitation to their practice—in order to consider the idea of authenticity from multiple angles.

Study Limitations and Potential Extensions

As a qualitative study with a relatively small sample size, the findings from this research are generalizable only to participants in and across each of the sites (Maxwell, 2005).

Nevertheless, the systematic and careful methodological design outlined above may warrant a degree of “face generalizability” (Singer, as cited in Maxwell, 2005)—or the development of a theory of good teachers that *may* be extended to or tested in other cases. Still, given the importance of measurable outcomes in our current educational environment, such a theory could be further tested by research exploring what connections, if any, exist between good teachers—as described by participants—and improved student achievement. How, for example, might including students’ perspectives about good teachers in our approach to understanding, evaluating, supporting, and training teachers affect student outcomes and experiences in school? Moreover, this study calls for future research that considers participants’ ideas in relation to those of teachers as well as school leaders.

Nevertheless, as I have shared throughout these opening chapters, complex questions—such as those related to the qualities, characteristics, and attributes of good teachers—may ultimately and best be explored through complementary and iterative approaches to research and knowing (Riehl, 2007). It is my hope that my research serves as one small step toward addressing such questions in novel and critical ways.

Chapter IV

RESEARCH SAMPLE & SETTINGS: A CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS, THEIR SCHOOL EXPERIENCES, AND THEIR TWO ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

In this chapter, I begin by describing the sample of students who volunteered for this study—including their sharings about their prior school experiences and academic challenges—as well as the two alternative high school programs participants attended during this research, Ellis Academy and Civis High School (pseudonyms). To help deepen and contextualize these descriptions, I also overview participants' painful stories of disengagement with school, and preview their transformational *re-engagement* with learning, teachers, and peers that they attributed to their alternative school experiences. While these participants' stories are as diverse as the students themselves, all of the participants who volunteered for my research (19/19) explained that their time in alternative schools yielded important academic, social, and/or personal benefits. Moreover, as I will describe in greater detail below, while the two school sites evinced commonalities and differences, students in both programs valued what they recognized as the smaller, accepting, and innovative environments of their new schools.

While, in the chapters that follow, I discuss learnings from my analyses of participants' descriptions of teachers—and their potential roles as exacerbators or ameliorators of student challenges—my intention here is to offer a closer look at the student participants, their academic journeys, and the two alternative school sites that backdrop all that follows. By sharing something of what these participants offered about themselves and their experiences—through their own words—my hope is to more effectively highlight the great strength and courage implicit in their contributions.

Importantly, and as I described in Chapter 3, because of the small sample size and the highly familiar relationships between participants and their alternative school teachers, I describe the sample in its entirety (rather than as two separate cases) in order to protect participants' confidentiality. For example, because participants shared very personal and sensitive experiences (some of which may be recognizable to the teachers and administrators of their schools), merging participants into a single sample—and describing demographic information without linking specifically to participants' self-selected pseudonyms—allowed for additional layers of confidentiality. In other words, because teachers and administrators at one site did not know the students and staff at the other, these measures make it impossible to identify a participant with certainty. While standard confidentiality measures (e.g., using only pseudonyms) would have likely sufficed for a broader audience, I want to share this work with the staff and students at each site as a way of giving back, so I wanted to honor confidentiality agreements—and participants—to the best of my ability. As I discuss in greater detail below, this descriptive strategy also accorded with my analytic interest in participants' sharings that transcended context, subject matter, or grade level.

Additionally, in this and all analytic chapters that follow, I offer “counts” (e.g., x/19) to indicate the frequency with which a particular idea or theme was mentioned by participants. Nevertheless, these counts are *not* indented to imply that participants excluded from these counts offered contrary opinions. Rather, because my approach to data collection intentionally involved very open-ended interview questions (as I described in Chapter 3), counts simply reflect the number of participants who spontaneously mentioned an idea during my research. In other words, these were ideas that participants brought up organically, and *of their own accord*.

Similarly, while I indicate counts at the opening of each new thematic section, the participant quotes I employ to flesh out these ideas in the narrative reflect the thinking of individuals included in the most recent count (i.e., each participant represents 1 of the x/19 previously indicated). Quotes were selected in order to (a) capture the sentiment shared by the larger group, (b) offer a more nuanced or augmentative point-of-view about a larger theme, and (c) maximize the diversity of voices included. Moreover, direct quotations from participants will always be set in quotation marks (italics are used exclusively for narrative emphasis and do not indicate a direct quotation).

Student Participants

As described in Chapters 1 and 3, nineteen (19) high school students from two different alternative programs, Ellis Academy (n=13) and Civis High School (n=6), volunteered to participate in this research. As alternative schools of choice operated by public school districts (Ellis was housed on its own campus while Civis was located in a separate facility adjoining a traditional high school), both Ellis Academy and Civis High School served students who—for a variety of reasons—were not succeeding or thriving in more traditional school placements. In this section, I provide an overview of the larger sample of student volunteers, including their demographic information and their reflections about their prior school environments and challenges.

To protect confidentiality, all participants were invited to select pseudonyms, and—with the exception of one student who asked me to pick a pseudonym for him—I use the names participants selected for themselves as I describe their stories and ideas. As I described above, however, because of the small size of the sample and programs, and also because of the sensitive nature of these participants' experiences and sharings, I have disassociated participant

pseudonyms from other demographic information (e.g., age, grade level, race, program attended) to further safeguard confidentiality. For example, because—as mentioned in Chapter 3—there was only one ninth grade student in my sample, linking that information to a pseudonym would compromise the confidentiality agreement. Similarly, while I will be using pseudonyms whenever possible to help connect the thread of individual participants’ thinking, feeling, and experiences, I will refer to a participant simply as “one participant” when I feel an example might be attributable to a specific individual (i.e., because a teacher or peer might recognize the anecdote or story the participant shared with me). In such a case, I will say something along the lines of “as one participant shared....” A list of participants’ selected pseudonyms follows in Figure 2, simply to make these names more familiar.

Bob	C.J.	Harlan	Jeff	Olive
Brian	Damon	Katy	Mark	Paco
Charlie	Frederick	Keith	Matt	Travis
Charlotte	Gina	Jack	Neil	

Figure 2: List of participant pseudonyms

Out of similar regard for participants’ confidentiality—and also related to my intention to look across cases for similar threads and themes—I describe the participants as a single sample. As described above, this enabled me to focus on cross-case analyses, as suggested by my second research question, and also further safeguarded participants’ confidentiality in light of the close and familiar relationships many shared with the teachers and administrators in their alternative schools. Accordingly, in this chapter and those that follow, themes and counts reflect cross-case

analyses, unless otherwise noted. Importantly, with the exception of one theme mentioned in Chapter 7 (I will note this specifically in the discussion), participants from both sites mentioned all of the ideas described in my analyses. In addition, in keeping with the literature about alternative schools described in Chapter 1, I use the terms “school” and “program” interchangeably when referring to participants’ alternative placements here and throughout.

With that said, the nineteen (19) participants I learned from in both alternative programs brought many diverse experiences and perspectives to this study. Ranging in age from 14 to 17 years, and in grade from 9th to 12th, these participants experienced a wide spectrum of school placements before enrolling in their respective alternative schools. Their reflections and recollections, for instance, pulled collectively from time in two urban school settings, eight different public suburban districts, one longer-term residential school program, one different alternative program (with more of a remedial, credit-recovery focus), three private religious schools, and two homeschooling environments. Likewise, participants described a number of different challenges that interfered with their learning in these prior settings, reflecting research about the diversity of struggles that can lead to student failure or dropout (e.g., Bowers & Spratt, 2012). For example, participants described struggles with: social challenges/social withdrawal (15/19), anxiety/depression (12/19), academic underperformance/failure (11/19), face-to-face and/or cyber-bullying (8/19), non-attendance/cutting class (7/19), learning or developmental challenges (6/19) (e.g., Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [5/19], Asperger’s Syndrome [1/19]), anger issues/disciplinary infractions (6/19), and family illness/hardship (5/19). While I have teased apart these challenges here and also in Table 3 below, it is important to note that, for many participants, these challenges were often overlapping and interrelated.

Table 3

Overview of Participants

Gender	Ethnicity	Ages	Grade Levels	Time in Alternative School	Prior School Placements	Challenges Reported
M: 15 F: 4	Students of Color: 7 White: 12 Students with one or more parents born in a foreign country: 3	14 yrs: 1 15 yrs: 3 16 yrs: 6 17 yrs: 9	9 th : 1 10 th : 3 11 th : 7 12 th : 8	< 1 yr: 5 Between 1 and 2 yrs.: 6 Between 2 and 3 yrs.: 6 > 3 yrs: 2	Urban Schools: 2 Suburban Districts: 8 Homeschooled: 2 Residential: 1 Religious: 3	Social Challenges/Withdrawal: 15 Anxiety/Depression: 12 Academic Underperformance/Failure: 11 Bullying: 8 Non-Attendance/Cutting Class: 7 Learning/Developmental Challenges: 6 Anger/Disciplinary Infractions: 6 Family Illness/Hardship: 5

Participants were similarly diverse in terms of culture and ethnicity. Seven participants, for instance, self-identified as students of color (including participants who identified as African American, Latino, Asian, Middle-Eastern, and bi-racial). In addition, three participants shared that at least one of their parents was born in a foreign country, and at least one additional participant had parents whose first language was a language other than English (I am not sure where this participant’s parents were born). While, in terms of gender, the sample was skewed in favor of males (15/19), this number is largely reflective of the alternative schools’ enrollment, particularly at Civis High School (which, as I will describe below, enrolled only two female students).

Finally, at the time of the first interviews, participants were enrolled in their alternative programs for different lengths of time. Five, for instance, attended their new school for less than a year (the shortest time being about four months). Six reported enrollments between one and two years, and six more attended between two and three years. Two other participants were enrolled for more than three years.

Participants' Descriptions of Their Prior School Environments

All of the participants in this study (19/19) courageously shared stories about the challenges and obstacles that complicated, and in some cases defined, their prior educational experiences—and that led to their decisions to attend alternative schools. While, as I will describe in the sections that follow, many of these painful stories involved the perceived *effects* of unsatisfactory school contexts on students and their learning, some participants' also pointed toward what they felt were underlying, school-based *causes* of their disengagement, including:

- The large size of most traditional schools (12/19),
- The pressures of testing/competition (7/19), and
- Social victimization/bullying (8/19).

While participants also discussed the role of teachers—as both exacerbators and ameliorators of these problems—I will present a detailed analysis of students' sharings about teachers, as the central focus of my research, in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

Size. When describing their previous schools, the majority of participants in this study (12/19) lamented the sheer size and scope of the buildings—or what Neil described as the “big, towering, symmetrical” look and feel of traditional, public high schools. “It looks like a mall where you go in—it’s too huge,” Matt characteristically shared, and, indeed, the large size of the schools (and the large number of students) left many participants feeling invisible or anonymous.

As Gina explained, “you’re just another number because there are thousands of kids [in a traditional high school].” The regimentation and routine required to keep such large schools running smoothly likewise rubbed many students the wrong way, and seemed, as Neil described, almost purposefully mechanized and alienating. “Once that bell rang,” he shared, “everyone knew where to go. And even in the hallways, people would dodge each other each and every day. I mean, not intentionally, but that’s just how it would move, you know?”

Pressure. In addition, more than one third of the participants (7/19) explicitly named the pressures of testing and competition as impediments to their success in their former schools. In keeping with the many studies that have documented the adverse effects of standards-based reforms on learning and teaching (e.g., Au, 2007, 2011; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Diamond & Spillane, 2004; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Vasquez Hellig, 2008; Natriello & Pallas, 2001; Nichols & Berliner, 2007), the emphasis on testing and grades that participants perceived in their prior schools distorted their experience as learners—and, as Darling-Hammond (2010) explained, may have unintentionally penalized groups (much like these participants) that these reforms were meant to benefit.

Echoing participants who shared this view, Charlotte summed up the sentiment:

I feel like in a traditional high school, a lot of the classes are very test oriented... There’s so much homework and busywork and testing to try to meet requirements and stuff. I mean, you don’t learn as much. You’re more trying to get information for a test or for homework. You’re not really thinking about “what does this mean?” or “what does it have to do with real life?”

Damon similarly explained that “school isn’t about actually learning; it tests your ability to learn new subjects”—and the compounding pressure of such mandates did not sit well with a number of the students in the study. “My high school was just a lot—I don’t want to say competitive, but I’m gonna say competitive,” Jeff offered in his characteristic, half-sarcastic lilt. As he continued,

“Because everyone was like, ‘Oh man, academics, y’all—you’ve gotta get those good grades.’” Matt, too, underscored the challenge of learning in such a context: “Once you enter the doors of [my old high school], you know competition is everywhere.... It’s so hot in there with competition you can burn yourself.” For Frederick, like a number of other participants, this pressure was directly related to the constant focus on formal testing. As he shared, “Most of the teachers, almost every day, they talk about how important the [state test] is. I don’t like the constant reminder, even though it’s coming. I know when it’s coming. I know it’s gonna get here.” Sadly, these kinds of reminders—though likely well-intentioned—left some students feeling left behind, insignificant, or even burdensome. As Mark shared, “When a school’s under that kind of pressure, they only care about numbers, every year’s statistics. [They ask] ‘How many students are in the 90th percentile this year?’ as opposed to ‘How many kids need our help today?’”

Social victimization/bullying. Perhaps most heartbreakingly, eight participants recounted their painful experiences with bullying and social victimization—both on-line and face-to-face. As these participants shared, this kind of ongoing harassment made it nearly impossible to focus in school, let alone do well. Moreover, as Jack recalled, the wounds of such experiences are hard to shake. “They [the other kids] used to poke a little more than fun at me,” he explained. “They started calling me names, started getting a little physical with me. They shoved me around and things. They called me horrible nicknames.” Assuring me, on the one hand, that he was “way over it,” Jack admitted, on the other that “it feels like it was yesterday.” Brian, too, half-joked that he’d have to bang his head “against the wall a few times to get rid of the memories” of his former mistreatment. While many of these participants resigned these incidents to their past and hoped, even, that enduring them made them stronger, it was clear that

the pain of the bullying and ostracization ran deep. After recounting years of name-calling and bullying by others in schools, for instance, Travis looked at me and sighed. “So, I had to deal with that for part of my life,” he acknowledged sadly. Like Olive, who explained that “when you’ve had some really bad [experiences], they’re all you can remember,” the effects of bullying and other negative school experiences lingered for many participants, as I will describe in greater detail next.

Participants’ Reflections on the Effects of Their Prior School Experiences

All of the participants in this study (19/19) shared many painful stories about the effects of their prior educational experiences on their learning and wellbeing. Indeed, taken together, their stories present a sorrowful tale of *turning away* from school, as many shared that they were eager to learn throughout it all, and had even done well up until a breaking point.

While a few participants (2/19) recalled always perceiving school negatively, most (12/19) pinpointed specific moments of *disengagement*, when things seemed to suddenly sour as a result of their unsatisfactory school placements. Like four other participants, for instance, C.J. located the root of his school troubles in the increased social and academic pressures of middle school. “In elementary school I did really well,” he confided, “but after middle school, I don’t know. It just knocked me down and made me more anti-social because of everything I had to deal with.... I felt like I didn’t really have that much to lose, really.” Like four additional participants, Charlie recognized the onset of his academic and social problems during high school:

I think it started near the end of 10th grade. The last month or two of school, I could only get in [to school] like half of the time because of a lot of extreme anxiety. And then the next year—11th—it happened at the end of the year too, so I thought it was just like an end of the year thing. I missed a lot of my final tests and things. But then, when I was going into 12th grade I couldn’t even make it in.

In addition to illustrating moments of disengagement, C.J.'s and Charlie's examples also point toward three of the most frequently named *effects* of students' negative school experiences:

- Prolonged emotional/mental turmoil (e.g., anxiety, depression, anger) (14/19),
- Ongoing social challenges and/or withdrawal (15/19), and
- Academic underperformance/failure (11/19).

As I describe below, these deleterious effects often impeded participants' learning and engagement, and—even for those participants in the study who were not underperforming academically—made their time in traditional schools unfulfilling, if not excruciating.

Negative emotional/mental stress. A majority of the participants I learned from (14/19) described serious and ongoing challenges with emotional and mental stress that were intensified by their negative experiences in schools. As Mark confided, “I was in the worst depression I’ve ever been in my whole life. Like, it was really hard to wake up every morning.... I was really, really, really bad.” Charlotte, too, was overwhelmed by the anxiety of trying to perform and stay ahead. “Like, everything counts toward something,” she explained to me,

and I think that was just a lot of pressure on me because...[I felt like] it was going to affect me for the rest of my life. If I got bad grades it might affect what college I got into and then what job I would be able to get.

Olive was similarly weighed down by what she described as an “unbelievable amount of stress for no reason.” “I’d find, like, ten gray hairs a week,” she admitted. Travis, too, recalled “being nervous the entire day—like sky high anxiety levels.”

Four participants also described how their stress manifested *physically*. Keith, for instance, shared that he missed a lot of school because of illness. But, he conceded, “most of that time I just didn’t really want to go to school.” Olive likewise reported experiencing “severe

stomach issues” because she “really didn’t like it there [in her prior school]” and was “just miserable.” As Charlie explained, he shared this problem to an extreme degree:

I was having a really bad time in the public school system...[because] I was having a ton of psychosomatic anxiety symptoms. I would become physically ill and throw up anytime I was in school. It wasn’t really the right place for me.

For other participants in my study (6/19), these negative feelings manifested outwardly, as anger. Five participants, for example, reported prior suspensions for disciplinary infractions (including fighting), although, as Matt explained, a suspension wasn’t “a hard time. You go out, you leave school for a day, you come back.” Others, like Jack, however, struggled on a daily basis to hold in aggressive frustrations:

Every day I would come home kicking the door, ‘I hate this place. I can’t stand it.’ I would punch holes in the wall until my knuckles were bleeding, almost.... You know that stereotypical [thing], you wake up in the morning and you smash the alarm clock? In like cartoons and stuff like that? Well, back in [my old school], because I despised everybody, instead of punching the alarm clock I would wake up and punch the wall and get my anger out—for at least the morning—and then try to make it to the bus.

Ongoing social challenges/withdrawal. The majority of participants (15/19) reported ongoing social challenges resulting, at least in part, from their negative school experiences, including unsuccessful attempts to fit in, a reluctance to risk new connections, and short- and long-term social withdrawal. While I discuss many of these experiences (in relation to both peers and teachers) in Chapter 5, I provide a few examples of participants’ struggles with social withdrawal here to help paint a fuller portrait of the kinds of experiences they have worked to overcome.

At the height of his troubles in school, for instance, Paco explained that he “didn’t go anywhere.” “I would sleep until, like, three o’clock,” he shared. “I would have twenty missed calls from a group of my friends—have texts and everything—and they were like, ‘Why aren’t

you coming outside?” Similarly, Mark described times during his earlier years in school when he just couldn’t face others, even friends. When they reached out and offered, “Hey, let’s go see a movie,” for instance, he could only answer, “I...I don’t...I can’t...I can’t.” “And the reason,” he explained to me, “is because I just felt sad. I couldn’t. I just—I don’t know why. I’m different from other people. I don’t fit into the crowd.” Moreover, at the time of this research, some of the participants were still working through these painful social challenges. C.J., for instance, confessed that, sometimes, he still wants “to go away somewhere and just, you know, just don’t do anything and just sleep.” Charlie, too, felt a constant sense of doubt creeping in upon the new relationships he had been working hard to build at his alternative school:

There’s always that air of doubt from that [prior rejection], [that] even if you’re liked, it’s not deserved. Just because of how it’s gone previously. [I worry] that they’re [the students and teachers at the alternative school] just kind of, you know, dealing with me...not so much liking me...It’s been a running theme in my public school career.

Academic underperformance/failure. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the many challenges on their plates, more than half of the participants in this study (11/19) reported significant academic struggles or failures. Neil, for instance, explained that the information he was trying to learn “wasn’t really getting picked up in [his] head” because of the large, overwhelming environment. As he explained, “There were, like, 30 other kids. I was in the back. I couldn’t hear the guy [the teacher]. It was that kind of environment. I just couldn’t listen, or sit, or pick up.” Even students like Charlotte, who were earning good grades, complained about the way the negative conditions influenced their learning. “I felt like I would get information,” Charlotte explained, “like write notes and everything, but then when I had to study for a test I’d study really hard and take the test and get a good grade, but then I’d forget it all after a certain amount of time because it didn’t mean anything.”

For seven of the eleven participants who described academic struggles, their frustrations with school translated into chronic cutting or non-attendance. As Jeff described this challenge, referencing his own experiences:

I'd just get into a comfortable position on my desk and then think about everything and not do anything. In those classes [in prior schools], I'd just think, 'Oh God, I really don't want to be here. I just wanna go home.' And I just got really stressed out and was like, 'Screw it. After this period I'm going home for the rest of the day.' Stuff like that.

Indeed, this kind of absence—or lack of mental and/or physical presence for instruction—became rather serious for one participant, Jack, who seriously considered dropping out. Jack's time in class, he explained, was agonizing, and it was almost impossible to do work: "I was scratching on the desk with my fingernails," he explained. "I was just kind of like, 'Get me out of here right now.' I would never lose sight of the clock on the wall." When, eventually, the situation in his school boiled over to the point that he felt he couldn't go back, he asked his mother, "So, am I dropping out or doing online courses?" When she explained that online courses weren't an option given Jack's behaviors and attitude at the time, Jack and his family began their search for a school placement that might better serve his needs.

Research Contexts: Two Alternative High School Programs

For Jack—and the other participants in this study—the process of school *re-engagement* began with their enrollment in one of two alternative high schools that served as the contexts for this research. In this section, I describe each of these programs, Ellis Academy and Civis High School, by offering an overview of their enrollments, considering their similarities and differences, and sharing participants' reflections about their new contexts—including the improvements they attributed to their time there.

Importantly, and just as with my description of participants, I limit my specific descriptions of each program in order to protect confidentiality. More specifically, given the limited number of alternative programs in the region and the fact that certain details would make the sites easily identifiable, I use broad strokes to describe the most important characteristics of each program.

That being said, both sites were located in well-resourced, inner-ring suburbs outside of New York City, and, together, served students from eleven local districts. While not all students who attended these programs lived in the alternative schools' home districts, all students, by nature of their enrollment, came from districts able to finance their attendance, so it is important to note that participants' disengagement from school was not likely attributable to limited school resources or amenities. In this way, my study helps to tease out the larger contextual, curricular, and interpersonal dynamics—beyond budget restraints and scarce resources—that alienate some students from otherwise “effective” schools. In other words, while a school's ability to afford basic and adequate amenities is inarguably key to the safe and productive learning of students in attendance, participants' stories of disengagement and re-engagement point to something *beyond* technical essentials when both turning away from and turning back toward school. A more detailed overview of each site's enrollment is presented, below, in Table 4.

Table 4

Site Enrollments

	Ellis Academy	Civis High School
Total student enrollment	45	20
Female students	16	2
Students of color	13	12
Percentage of Special education students	75	50
Percentage of Receiving free or reduced lunch	N/A ²	50
Districts served	7	4

While the enrollment at both sites fluctuated slightly throughout the duration of my study, when this research concluded, Ellis Academy had a total of 45 students—16 of which were female, and 13 of which were students of color. The school’s principal shared that approximately 75 percent of the students were special education students with individualized education plans (IEPs), and the school’s secretary shared that the students came to the school from seven different local districts (including the program’s home district). Because Ellis Academy did not serve food to students (students brought lunch or left campus to purchase something to eat), data regarding students’ eligibility for free or reduced lunch options were not available.

The enrollment at Civis High Schools was slightly smaller, with a total enrollment of 20 students at the time of the study’s conclusion, a few of whom only attended classes at the site for less than half the day. Of the total Civis students enrolled during my research, 2 were female, and 12 were students of color. The program secretary shared that approximately 50 percent of

² Ellis Academy did not have a food service program, so did not collect FRL data.

the students had IEPs, and 50 percent were receiving free or reduced lunch. Students from Civis High School attended the alternative program from 4 different districts (including the site's home district).

Program Similarities

While different in size, both Ellis and Civis were smaller, relational programs of choice for students who did not fit or succeed in traditional public schools. More specifically, they were programs aimed toward better supporting and serving students seeking a regular high school diploma—but who needed more personalized attention and flexible learning opportunities to reach their goals. Both sites, too, had been in operation for a number of years, although Ellis Academy had been operating for a significantly longer period of time (e.g., Civis was established less than 10 years ago, while Ellis had been operating for more than 20 years). While these sites primarily followed high school curricula, both sites did serve or had served a small number of 8th grade students when deemed appropriate by the students' families and school staff/administrators. In line with my selection criteria, both programs were “opt-in,” and the students at both were often referred by teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, psychologists, peers, and/or family members. In other words, students at Ellis and Civis were not mandated to attend these alternative schools by their districts or any court system, but elected to attend by choice. In most cases, students who were considering enrolling at either site set up a school visit, during which time they had the opportunity to experience the school culture and meet the staff and students. Final enrollment decisions were made collaboratively with each student, parents/guardians, and school staff.

Common to both Ellis and Civis were also mixed grade-level classes, meaning that students took most of their subject classes with peers from different grade levels. These

classes—while designed to help students meet graduation and testing requirements—were also individually tailored to meet student needs and interests, and documents from both programs (e.g., websites, brochures, and classwork) emphasized the importance of creative, innovative teaching and course offerings.

Program Differences

Despite these core similarities, there were a number of differences between the two programs that are important to acknowledge. I offer these details—not to compare and contrast the relative merits or detriments of the programs—but rather to emphasize that many of the participants’ sharings were common *across* settings, despite these program differences. Moreover, as I discuss in Chapters 7 and 8, participants’ reflections about some of these structural conditions may have important implications for practice and further research.

That said, some of the biggest differences between the two programs seemed to stem from the locations of the sites themselves. Ellis Academy, for instance, was housed in its own facility, on a separate campus from the district’s mainstream school buildings. Civis High School, on the other hand, was located in a separate facility on the campus of the district’s main high school. Because of this, the fluidity of movement between the alternative schools and their mainstream counterparts was significantly different at each site—for both students and teachers. The teachers, secretary, and principal at Ellis, for instance, remained at the school for the full day, and offered all credit-bearing courses, including electives. This allowed for frequent staff meetings (e.g., before, during, and after school) and increased opportunities for collaboration. Most students, but not all, also remained at the alternative school for the full day.

At Civis, the setup was quite different, with only one teacher and one teaching assistant/secretary remaining in the building full-time, while the rest of the staff split their

teaching duties between the alternative program and the traditional high school. Teachers, then, at Civis were generally in the alternative school for one or two periods, and students, too, went over to the “main” building for multiple periods to attend elective classes. In this way, teachers had less collaborative time, but students at Civis had greater access to electives and advanced classes offered to all students in the district.

Another significant difference between the two sites was the use or non-use of traditional grades. Perhaps because of its close proximity to and interconnection with the mainstream high school, Civis’ grading policy mirrored the traditional number grades offered in the district. Ellis Academy, on the other hand, adopted more of a portfolio approach to grades, with students receiving community feedback about the credit they’d earned (or not earned) over the course of each grading period. Despite this difference, students in both programs were supported and encouraged in their academic work on an ongoing and continual basis.

Participants’ Descriptions of Their Alternative Schools: Places of Re-Engagement

The limited research about alternative school students’ perceptions of their school environments suggests that students generally prefer their alternative settings to traditional schools (e.g., Bernstein, 2009; De La Ossa, 2005; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Saunders & Saunders, 2001)—and learnings from my research echo findings from this literature and prior research. Put simply, *all* of the student participants I learned from (19/19) described their alternative school as a more positive, helpful, and accepting place than their prior placement. Indeed, the majority of these participants (14/19) specifically described their alternative school as a comfortable, welcoming place that made them want to stay in school, even beyond required hours. In light of participants’ gut-wrenching descriptions of earlier school experiences and prior disengagement, this alone seems worthy of further consideration.

Moreover, when describing what was most helpful to them about their alternative schools, the majority of participants (12/19) attributed their newfound enthusiasm for school at least in part to their program's small size, more than a third (7/19) expressed appreciation for their school's different approach to teaching and learning, and eight of the nineteen (8/19) embraced their alternative school enrollment as a simple but much needed chance to start over. Again, these counts are not intended to imply discrepant data, but rather to raise up the number of participants who emphasized a particular theme in their reflections. Likewise, as counts suggest, a number of participants named more than one of these ideas—although all participants are represented in at least one of these counts. Below, I describe each of these themes in greater detail. Importantly, while participants described many ways that their teachers helped with these and other positive aspects of their alternative school experiences, I reserve my specific discussion of participants' perceptions of teachers for Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

A comfortable place to be. For the majority of the student participants I learned from (14/19), one of the most important and frequently mentioned benefits of their alternative school enrollment was a newfound feeling of comfort and welcome. No matter where they were coming from, or what they had experienced, these participants agreed that their alternative school was a place where they felt at home. As Keith characteristically shared of his program, "There's really a love here...and when you leave you always want to come back." Something about the culture and community, he described, gave students a feeling that allowed them to realize—sometimes to their surprise—that, "Hey, there's this place out there for me." C.J., too, spoke of the enduring draw of his alternative school, despite his tendencies toward withdrawal and seclusion. As he shared:

Well, honestly, if this school were to close down, I probably wouldn't want to go back to school. I wouldn't even want to come. Who would go there [the prior

school]? I'd rather stay home. It's [the alternative school] just like home for me, a second home. I wish it was open 24 hours so if I had no place to go I could just come here. Sometimes, I honestly just want to sleep here. I don't want to leave sometimes.

Many participants shared C.J.'s assessment of their alternative program as a safe place of acceptance and refuge, and reported a positive shift in their feelings about school. Even amidst a frightening account of watching storm water from a major hurricane flood and damage her home, for instance, one participant (pseudonym masked for confidentiality) earnestly added, "The worst part for me was missing school, though." Similarly, Jack—whose story of bullying and school refusal I shared briefly above—explained that he finally has "a bit of push to get out the front door" in the morning, now that he's attending his alternative school. "Instead of dragging my feet, looking at myself in the mirror, and going, 'Don't do anything stupid' [before heading off to school]," he explained, "I just put my hat on, come over, and I'm fine and go back home. It's all good." Ultimately, as Keith shared of his alternative program, with wisdom seemingly beyond his years, "It's a school for people that, during their high school years, felt and realized that they need more than what they were being given. They needed to find out what they wanted, not just from a school, but from themselves." The opportunity to find such a place, these participants shared, made all the difference in the world.

Appreciation for small size. Just as many participants lamented the large and, at times, overwhelming size of their prior school placements, more than half of these students (12/19) explained, as Katy did, that their alternative school re-engagement was "probably because it's a small school here." Yet, as researchers of small school reforms have argued (e.g., Ready, Lee, & Welner, 2004; Ready & Lee, 2008), successful small schools require more than limited enrollments and technical reorganizations to fully meet the needs of diverse learners. While I discuss the kinds of teachers and teaching that helped these participants better reap the benefits

of smaller school and class sizes in the chapters that follow, I offer below two participants' representative clarifications about the shift in thinking and relating that accompanied their positive experiences of small school size.

When asked, for instance, why the alternative school environment felt helpful to him, Matt emphasized the possibility of more genuine relationships in the smaller context. "It was small," he explained, thinking back to his first experience with the school. "It was a small place, it was small classes, it was meeting new people—but meeting them in a different way.... It's more of a get to know you on a deeper level type of thing." Keith, too, appreciated the "breathing room" he was afforded in the smaller, less-hectic environment—both for learning and self-development. As he explained, capturing some of what he and other participants appreciated about their smaller alternative schools:

In most schools you go to class day by day, but you don't really have a moment. You don't have a period to just, like, work on your own personality.... You don't have that free time to express yourself the way that you want to.

As I describe in later chapters, both of these benefits—the ability to connect more deeply with others, and the space and opportunity to truly grow oneself—were important aspects of participants' work with teachers as well.

A different way of teaching and learning. Regarding the overall philosophy of teaching and learning in the alternative programs, seven of these nineteen participants (7/19) praised what they described as a different, more innovative approach. For example, capturing this idea, Charlotte offered the following:

I think they teach things here from a different angle.... [It's an opportunity] to learn things in sort of a different way...[and I feel like I] get more out of it than trying to cram information for a test and then not really using it,

Keith, too, shared that the more laid back, personal approach he experienced in his alternative school helped him and others in the program to “have an idea of who you are and maybe what you’d like to learn as a person.” He continued, “It’s kind of like the restriction of being in school—going about a six-hour day—kind of gets released from you.”

Moreover, while some participants (6/19) felt that others might look down upon alternative schools as “fake” or “subpar” (I describe this challenge in greater detail later in this chapter), Matt and Mark had strong words for naysayers. “When people say it’s not a normal way of high school,” Matt asserted, “I would say, ‘Yes, it is. And it’s a way that I’ve chosen.’”

As he continued:

Being here at school is a different experience, because you’re not under pressure of the...public school system. You’re being pressured by yourself. If you want to pass or fail this class, you’re being pressured by yourself, which is healthy.

Mark, too, adamantly championed the valuable teaching and learning that took place in his school:

Just because ‘alternative’ is in the title, it’s not an alternative *to* school, it’s an alternative *in* school, learning wise [emphasis his]. It’s just a different way of teaching...and I feel like if people provided that kind of [teaching] to their students in other schools, they’d see the results they’ve been hoping for.

In chapters that follow, I piece together a more nuanced portrait of this “different” approach to teaching and learning, as described by the student participants who experienced it.

A chance to start over. Perhaps most simply, eight of the nineteen participants (8/19) appreciated their alternative school as a chance, fundamentally, to begin again—to move, literally, *away* from the bullies, the crowds, and the struggles that seemed to be dragging them down.

Mark, for instance, intentionally approached his start at the alternative school as an opportunity for reinvention. “I came here,” he explained, “and hoped I could leave the past that I

had...I decided I wanted to try this in a school [and] I went in.” Neil likewise described his decision to attend the alternative school as a most-welcomed second chance:

So when I was here and I started,...it was such a fresh start—like nothing else mattered. So everything I did here would just count as new, and that’s all people would care about. So that’s how I started here.... I just kind of like forgot who I was academically and I just went for it.

As I describe next, all of the participants I learned from (19/19) reported that the favorable conditions in their alternative schools—including comfortable environments, small size, innovative curricula, and possibilities for new beginnings—yielded important benefits and improvements, both personally and academically.

Improvements Participants Attributed to Their Alternative School Experiences

All of the students who participated in my study explained that their alternative school placement helped them in important ways, and their reported improvements fell primarily into three categories:

- Academic/learning improvements (17/19),
- Social improvements (15/19), including increased acceptance *by* (13/19) and *of* others (11/19), and
- Personal growth/self-acceptance (13/19).

While in the chapters that follow, I offer a more detailed discussion of these positive changes in relation to participants’ understandings of teachers, I mention them here in order to provide an overview of the kinds of powerful, meaningful, and even life-changing shifts participants attributed to their time in alternative schools. Moreover, as the high frequency counts suggest, many participants experienced improvements *across* domains—suggesting the multidimensional benefits of the kinds of teaching described in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 for a diverse sample of alternative high school students.

Academic improvements. Briefly, nearly all of the student participants (17/19) reported a range of academic improvements that they felt resulted from their time in alternative schools. Many, for example, described improved grades and attendance, more meaningful learning experiences, significant credit/course recovery, strong/satisfactory performances on state tests, and progress with personal learning challenges (e.g., public speaking, writing). One student in the study was even able to graduate a semester early (pseudonym withheld for confidentiality).

For example, reflecting on these academic benefits, Jeff was able to look back thoughtfully on his prior challenges with cutting and non-attendance. As he acknowledged, “This year is a lot better than last year. I’ve basically been here every single day of the year that we had school so far.” Paco also recognized a dramatic improvement in his school attendance and performance. “I’m coming in and doing work,” he shared proudly—before adding, with a smile, “It feels good.” Travis, too, reported with pride the perfect essay score he’d earned on an English Language Arts state assessment. “That is one of my greatest accomplishments so far here,” he explained. Similarly, Neil described the first time he completed a marking period with complete success as an important turning point for him. “The fact that I handed in, like, every assignment...it was amazing,” he told me. “I called my dad and he was crying over the phone [with happiness].” Looking back on this big achievement, Neil offered the following reflection about the importance of perseverance and openness to change: “You do something so many times, or you fail so many times, to realize how to succeed, I guess.” Indeed, for all of the student participants who reported improved learning and academic performance, their alternative schools were places that allowed them, finally, to achieve—in the truest sense of the word.

Social improvements. Nearly all of the participants in my research (15/19) likewise described meaningful social improvements that they attributed to their alternative school

enrollments. In sharp contrast to the painful stories of bullying and isolation described above, for instance, participants explained that they felt accepted by peers in their new schools (13/19)—and also shared strong feels of acceptance *for* others (11/19). Finally feeling more comfortable and confident, for example, C.J. reported new efforts to “open up and give people a chance” in order to “get back into the game” with friends and others. “[I’m] just starting again,” he explained, “so it’s difficult. But I’m doing it.” Katy similarly explained that, despite her painful prior experiences with peer harassment, the students in her alternative school were accepting of the fact that they were “all here for different reasons.” “It’s like we all know that we’re here for a reason,” she described, “so we kind of help each other.” Neil echoed this common sentiment, relishing his perception that “it doesn’t matter who we are, where we are. It just matters that we’re here.” With a gladness that was hard for him to describe, he recalled the feeling of “just seeing everyone’s face [in the school], and [seeing] how all these different people can, like—all at the same moment—be so happy together.” In chapters that follow, I describe these important shifts in thinking and feeling, which were shared by the majority of participants, in greater detail.

Personal growth/self-acceptance. Powerfully, thirteen of the nineteen (13/19) participants in my study also described fundamental and positive adjustments to their understandings of self. While this particular improvement—and what participants described as teachers’ pivotal role in supporting such personal growth—will be the focus of the next chapter, I want to offer, for now, two short examples that are representative of the kinds of sentiments participants shared.

Matt, for instance, described his evolving ability to take perspective on his life, his challenges, and his accomplishments that resulted from his time in alternative schools—which he

described as “a different way of understanding yourself and where you come from, and, basically, where you’re going.” Similarly poignant were participants’ emerging feelings of peace and positive self-regard that they attributed, at least in large part, to their experiences in their new schools.

Mark, for example, had the following to say: “I considered my life, for a long time, very unlucky.... [But] unlucky things happened to me to get me where I am today. Maybe that was just fate, or whatever. But I’m glad that I came here.”

While, as I share more about below, such growth and acceptance “doesn’t [necessarily] happen for all people” in alternative schools (as Keith put it), when it does “there’s a spark.” The elusive nature of this “spark”—and the kinds of teachers and connections that can precipitate meaningful growth and success for students—sit at the heart of this inquiry and also the chapter discussions that follow.

“Not for Everyone”: Alternative School Negatives

In order to offer the clearest possible picture of the two alternative schools that served as context for this research, and also to honor the range of experiences and perspectives participants shared with me, it is important to highlight some of the *challenges* a few participants associated with their alternative placements. Accordingly, below, I briefly describe participants’ reflections about the challenges of small school size (1/19), the limited academic offerings within the alternative school itself (3/19), and the negative stigma often associated with alternative education (6/19). I close with a few participants’ (3/19) reflections about the *invitational* quality of alternative schools—and the fact that they are not the only answer for every student.

Size. While, as I shared above, the majority of participants (12/19) mentioned small size as a key alternative school *support*, one participant (1/19) offered a contrary perspective on the

issue. Indeed, as part of her thoughtful sharing, Gina lamented the fact that when you don't get along with others in a small alternative school, "you definitely come across people that you don't really like being in the presence of more often."

Limited academic offerings. Additionally, three of the nineteen students (3/19) worried that their academic work wasn't as challenging for them as it would be in a traditional high school. For example, in order to take advanced classes, students at Ellis usually participated in independent studies or took online courses. While Civis High students technically had access to the large, traditional high school for electives and other courses, most Civis students took their main subject courses (e.g., math, science, English, social studies) within the alternative school at the time of my research. Still, while one participant who shared this concern about limited academics admitted that, for him, "the plusses definitely outweigh the minuses," the limited opportunity for advanced coursework within the alternative school itself was something he found "a bit hard to look past."

Negative stigma. Participants' most frequently cited concern about their alternative schools was the stigma they found to be linked with alternative education in general. In fact, six of the nineteen participants in this study (6/19) described their efforts to challenge others' perceptions of their school as "a school for delinquents," as one student put it. Travis, for example, fervently stood up to people's assumptions about him and his classmates as alternative school attendees. "Look at me," he recalled saying angrily to a peer from a traditional high school who was disparaging his school. With great passion, he continued his challenge, "Look me in the eye and tell me I smoke weed and drugs, that I'm a loser and an outcast of society." Yet, accompanying these participants' fighting spirit was what might best be termed the pride of the underdog. As Travis continued, "When people asked me where I was going in the beginning

of this year for schooling...I was kind of ashamed. But now when people ask me where I go, right away [snaps his fingers], without hesitation, I say [the school name].”

Not for everyone. In addition to this, three participants (3/19) agreed that, despite their own positive experiences in alternative schools, “there are other people that it just doesn’t work for.” Some people, as Keith explained, “don’t have any problems in school” and don’t need an alternative environment. Still others, he noted, may not be ready or willing to make the changes necessary for success, and end up leaving alternative programs voluntarily (or with lesser or greater amounts of encouragement). Similarly, speaking rhetorically to fellow students who had come and gone unsuccessfully during his own tenure as an alternative school student, Jack shared the following: “We might be here to help you,” he explained, “but if you’re not even attempting to change, what are you doing here?”

Ultimately, then, these student participants suggested that alternative schools—like all schools—can find room to improve and evolve. Moreover, their sharings highlighted the important fact that even the best schools can provide students only with *opportunities* and *invitations* for genuine growth. True change, these participants seemed to imply, requires an internal commitment—a certain mettle that can be encouraged but never forced. As Frederick explained, summing up this important idea about change and success, “I don’t know if it’s really up to [teachers].” When it comes to students’ personal and academic improvements, he asserted, “It’s [really] up to the students.”

Chapter Summary & Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced the diverse group of 19 high school students who graciously shared their experiences and perspectives with me—as well as the two alternative high school programs that served as contexts for this research. In addition to a demographic overview of

both the participants and the school sites, I used participants' stories and descriptions to flesh out prominent themes about their prior school experiences and challenges, as well as the improvements they attributed, at least in part, to their time in alternative schools.

While, as the participants themselves noted above, alternative schools are not a panacea or cure-all for the many challenges facing contemporary education, they are—according to participants—fertile grounds for experimentation, personalization, and authentic learning and growth. In fact, at least three of the student participants in this study (3/19) volunteered for my research with the express purpose of helping others in the educational community to “actually see what places like these are like.” As Keith similarly shared:

I volunteered because I know that there hasn't been anything to change the way people feel about these kinds of schools.... Everyone just likes to assume that it keeps running because they have to keep throwing people in here. They don't understand why a school like this has run for so long and seen so much success.... They don't want to see. They don't care to look at kids that have already graduated from this school or look at the kids that are in there right now. They don't think they're going anywhere, but they do go somewhere....No one's choosing to look because it comes in a small package.

Moreover, in perhaps one of the best illustrations of how very fortunate I was to work with this amazing group of students, more than half (10/19) explained that they volunteered, first and foremost, simply to help others. “Hopefully your paper can touch somebody's heart and change their ways,” Bob shared with me at the end of his first interview. “I mean,” he continued, “if you don't change the direction of the way you're heading, then you'll just end up where you are going.” Harlan, too, wanted to contribute because, as he explained, “I care. Like, I *care*—you know what I mean [emphasis his]?”

In ways that buoyed my spirits as well as my resolve, six participants (6/19) also explained that they shared my intellectual curiosity about the elusive puzzle about what makes a “good” teacher. During her focus group, for instance, Charlotte asked if she could attend the

next group I would be running to review some of what I'd learned with different students. "I won't eat anything," she promised, in reference to the pizza and snacks I provided. "I just wanna get the other opinions. This is fascinating to me!" I was similarly honored when three other participants (3/19) specifically asked to read my dissertation once it was completed.

In the chapters that follow, I begin to paint a more nuanced portrait of these generous participants' descriptions and understandings of "good" teachers—including the importance of individual identity and relationships in education for *both* students and teachers. I hope that, when the participants who made this research possible have the opportunity to read and consider these findings, they are proud of the contributions they made and the exciting work that we did together.

Chapter V

SEEING STUDENTS: TEACHERS AS SUPPORTERS OF GROWTH AND IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

In this first findings chapter, I begin with an overview of the three major learnings about good teachers that I drew from participants' sharings—including the critical importance of (a) seeing students in the psychological sense, meaning recognizing and treating them as valuable individuals, (b) genuinely sharing one's self as a teacher, meaning revealing oneself and one's commitments as a “real” person, and (c) mutual, authentic relationships throughout a school community as a support to learning. Taken together, I will argue, these themes—and participants' elaborations of them—lend credence to and extend the applicability of Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) framework for authentic teaching, which was developed in and for the higher education context, to alternative education settings. Likewise, these three main ideas offer a composite portrait of the most essential elements of good teaching, from these participants' perspectives. While, inarguably, these ideas are interrelated in theory as well as practice, I address each of them separately in this chapter and the chapters that follow in order to highlight participants' particular thinking in relation to each theme.

Following this brief preview of the overarching findings from my research, I focus, in the remainder of this chapter, on participants' descriptions of being *seen* by teachers (in the psychological sense) as an essential support to their learning and identity development. Beginning with an account of the ways these participants described good teachers' abilities to know, care about, and understand them—or *see* them, as I'm describing it—as well as the ways these ideas echo learnings from the research literature, I then expand this discussion by focusing

more specifically on participants' stories of school-related identity development, and the ways that teachers served as facilitators or inhibitors of their personal growth by either seeing or failing to see them as valuable, worthwhile, and capable individuals. I end the chapter with a section connecting participants' examples to concrete, pedagogical takeaways. In other words, I extend the larger discussion by offering practical strategies for seeing students based on participants' on-the-ground descriptions of their interactions with real teachers.

Overview of Study Findings

As I described in Chapters 1, 2, and 3, the main purpose of my research was to better understand how a diverse group of alternative high school students described, understood, and experienced good teachers—including the important qualities, characteristics, or attributes that seemed to transcend subject, grade level, or even school site. My deepest hope, really, was to understand—as best as possible—participants' lived experiences as learners, and to take their thoughts, feelings, and opinions *into account* when piecing together a description of good teachers that I could learn from and also share with others. Likewise, as I shared previously, I was also interested in learning if Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) framework for authentic teaching—which was originally developed with and in relation to university professors—could be expanded and extended to apply to this different context. Because the framework's five dimensions (which, loosely translated, equated to *self*, *other*, the *relationship between the two*, an *awareness of context*, and a *critically reflective approach*) helped bring clarity to my 2009 pilot interviews with five alternative high school students, I was interested to see how, if at all, this framework might help to organize and bring together a different group of participants' descriptions of good teachers. An illustration of Cranton and Carusetta's original framework—with all five dimensions—can be found, once again, in Figure 3 below.

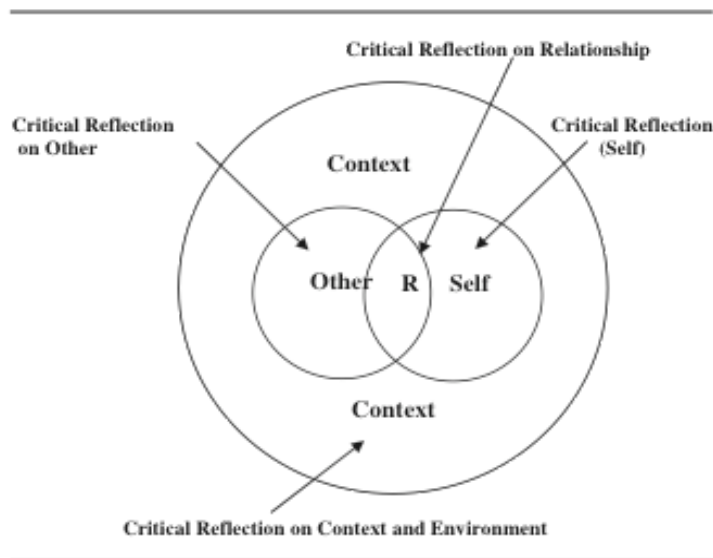


Figure 3: Cranton & Carusetta's (2004) original model of authenticity in teaching. From "Perspectives on Authenticity in Teaching," by P. Cranton and E. Carusetta, 2004, *Adult Education Quarterly*, 55, p. 20.

As I will briefly share here and throughout my dissertation, the findings from my research with this new group of nineteen student participants suggested that the framework is indeed a promising lens through which to consider good teaching from their perspectives. Moreover, these participants' emphases on the importance of (a) being seen by teachers, (b) seeing and knowing teachers in return, and (c) positive, mutual relationships throughout the school community (each of which I will discuss briefly below) affirmed and extended the dimensions of the framework in meaningful ways. Importantly, because I already touched upon participants' descriptions of context when describing their regular education and alternative school settings in Chapter 4, and because I will offer a more nuanced discussion of teacher reflection in Chapter 8, I focus my discussion (and findings chapters) on the three components at

the center of the framework: self, other, and relationships. While not every student mentioned every aspect of the model, and some emphasized certain dimensions more than others, together, they overwhelmingly recognized that “authenticity” has a key role to play in the practice of their best teachers.

As previously mentioned, the descriptions below (and throughout this dissertation) reflect my cross-case analysis of participants’ sharings. Moreover, as noted in Chapter 4, counts indicate the number of participants who spontaneously named a particular idea during our open-ended interview discussions, and do not imply that others disagreed with these ideas or offered contrary opinions. Likewise, quotes were selected to maximize the diversity of participants’ voices and to best illustrate key ideas. An overview of participants’ descriptions of good teachers, and my three main findings, follows.

Participants’ Descriptions of Good Teachers

Before diving into the three main findings of my research—which involve seeing students, teacher selfhood, and mutual relationships—it seems important to note that a number of participants (5/19) recognized the implicit challenge of defining and capturing the essence of a good teacher. As Olive acknowledged, capturing this sentiment, “It’s such an easy question, but I can’t really answer it.” Charlie similarly pointed toward a good teacher’s “x-factor,” or that intangible quality that “you can’t [quite] put your finger on.” C.J., too, had this to say about what makes a good teacher: “It’s kind of like a chi or something, an extra guiding power, a natural force. I don’t know how else to describe it.” Perhaps most specifically, Frederick added his own reflection about a good teacher’s elusive qualities:

I don’t know what a good teacher is. Not to say that I don’t know what a good teacher is, but I can’t describe one—because a good teacher is made of too many qualities. You have to have every kind of quality to be a good teacher. You have to be everything.

Despite the inherent difficulty of capturing something that, typically, “doesn’t appear on paper,” as Charlie pointed out, the nineteen participants that I learned from helped me to generate a compelling portrait of good teachers that extends Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004) framework in meaningful ways. Moreover, while all of the participants helped to tease out the positive qualities and attributes of the teachers in their alternative school programs, many were able to reflect back, as well, over their wide range of school experiences (e.g., public, private, and home school contexts in both suburban and urban settings) and offered patterns, themes, and suggestions for working with at-risk students across contexts. Findings are presented briefly below and will be discussed in greater detail in the chapters that follow.

Finding 1: Seeing students is of critical importance. For all of the participants in this study (19/19), a teacher’s ability to care about and understand students was the starting point for their definitions of good teachers. While this emphasis on respectful recognition involved knowing students both academically and personally, fifteen of the nineteen participants (15/19) also stressed the importance of being seen, *fundamentally*, as worthwhile, valuable, and capable human beings. As I will describe later in this chapter, this simple but profound act of recognition yielded powerful benefits for participants’ learning and lives. A representation of the critical importance of seeing students is presented below, in Figure 4. In this representation, which is an adaptation of Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004) original model, I focus specifically on the visibility of the student self (i.e., as a prominent and clearly visible circle within the larger alternative school context).

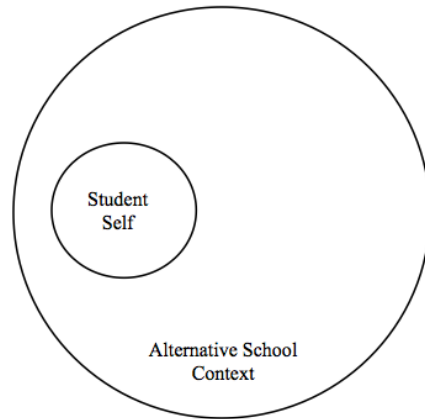


Figure 4: Seeing the student self in the alternative school context: An important first step

Finding 2: Participants recognize the importance of a teacher’s authentic self. As I will discuss in Chapter 6, second only to participants’ emphasis on being seen was their interest in seeing and knowing their teachers as “real” and genuine people. Indeed, sixteen of the nineteen participants (16/19) located the source of a teacher’s work in the personality, passion, or self of the teacher. In light of historical and contemporary constructions of teaching as a “selfless” act—as one directed, for instance, *by* others, or one conducted *for* others, altruistically—this finding is of particular significance. The vital importance of a teacher’s identity to his or her successful work with this group of students is represented below, in Figure 5. Here, again, I adapted Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004) original model by highlighting—in its own clearly visible circle—the teacher self within the alternative school context.

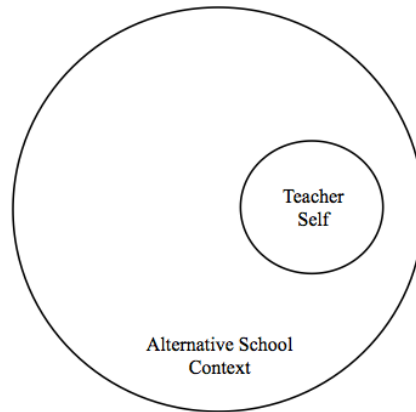


Figure 5: Teacher identity as an important component of good teaching

Finding 3: Mutual relationships are key to participants' learning and identity development. As I will describe in Chapter 7, relationships were another essential focus of participants' descriptions of good teachers. Their relationships with teachers, for instance (which are represented below in Figure 6 as a balanced meeting of student and teacher selves), were key to many participants' abilities to succeed in their new school settings. While participants recognized authentic student-teacher relationships as a unique and complex balancing act, fourteen of the nineteen student participants (14/19) offered insights about the centrality of these vital relationships, and tips about how good teachers could best enter into and foster genuine connections with students.

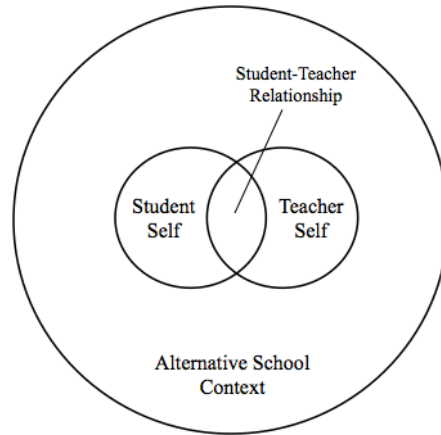


Figure 6: The student-teacher relationship in an alternative school context

In addition, participants offered important theoretical extensions about the role of relationships in alternative teaching and learning environments by emphasizing the relationships good teachers facilitated *throughout* a school community. Fifteen of the nineteen participants (15/19), for example, emphasized the importance of peer-to-peer relationships for their learning, and some (4/19) specifically mentioned the ways that teachers’ modeling and assistance supported their social connections. Similarly, although mentioned by fewer participants, a number of students (3/19) pointed to the importance of teacher-to-teacher connections and the benefits of close staff collaboration. As ten participants (10/19) explained during their interviews (and as nearly all participants seemed to agree upon during focus group discussions), relationships in alternative schools were really more about “everyone together” than about any individual student’s connection to any individual teacher.

In light of this powerful insight, I have offered an expanded illustration of relationships in alternative schools below, in Figure 7. In this visualization, the synergistic intersection of diverse student-teacher, student-student, and teacher-teacher relationships is represented by a series of overlapping circles.

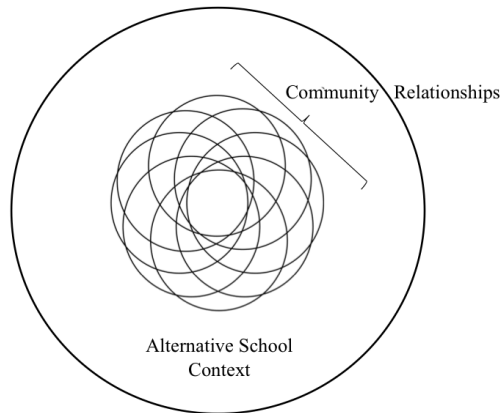


Figure 7: Community relationships in an alternative school context

In the remainder of this chapter and in the chapters that follow, I explore these themes in greater detail. Next, I offer a detailed discussion of participants’ sharings related to being *seen* and understood by good teachers. Importantly, as I will describe in greater detail through this and the following chapters, participants’ descriptions of teachers across all three findings focused primarily on *affective* characteristics and capacities. Indeed, while participants respected, admired, and even expected good teachers’ subject matter competence and general intelligence, they spoke most frequently and passionately about a teacher’s ability to understand, respect, and connect with students, to inspire and model authentic learning, and to bring diverse groups of students together in community. As Rogers and Freiberg (1994) wisely explained, “Humanity is the most important part of our schools” (p. xxii)—and, for these participants, genuine human connections with teachers served as vital prerequisites for their learning and success, especially given their difficult and often painful prior educational experiences.

Seeing Students: Teachers as Supporters of Growth and Identity Development

The importance of caring for students—especially students at-risk of educational failure—is well documented in the research literature (e.g., Jennings & Greenberg, 2009;

Johnston & Nicholls, 1995; Noddings, 1984, 2005, 2013; Schussler & Collins, 2006), and is intimately connected to progressive, humanist, and constructivist educational paradigms that place the student at the center of both pedagogy and the classroom (Cornelius-White, 2007; Cuban, 1993; Dewey, 1938; Kliebard, 2004; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The fact, then, that *all* nineteen of the student participants in this study (19/19) emphasized caring for and understanding students as the most fundamental characteristic of good teachers is both unsurprising and a testament to their wisdom. Indeed, as I will share more about below, these participants' descriptions of teachers' effective student-centered practices bring together and support findings from other studies about teachers and teaching—and confirm the prudence of one student's advice for anyone interested in learning about good teachers: “Listen to the students,” he told me, “because they're the best source of information. They're the ones in the classes.” With this valuable truth in mind, I next present participants' sharings about good teachers' abilities to:

- Understand and care about students—both academically (8/19) and personally (12/19),
- Demonstrate patience and persistence in the face of student challenges (8/19), and
- Look beyond first impressions or assumptions to see value and possibility in students (15/19).

My first focus, here, is on highlighting the connections between participants' descriptions and what we know about seeing and understanding students from prior research. While certainly not an exhaustive review, the idea is to present a more detailed account of participants' conceptions (including the frequency with which specific themes were mentioned), and also to demonstrate their congruence to a family of related ideas developed over time and from different angles. After this, I offer a detailed account of participants' stories about school-related identity

development, to further illuminate the power of teachers' genuine *recognitions* of students—and what these deeper “seeings” meant to and felt like for participants. As these participants shared, teachers played integral roles as both facilitators *and* inhibitors of their personal growth by either seeing or failing to see them for who they were or wanted to be. I conclude this discussion about seeing students with a collection of takeaways for identity-affirming classroom practice, as suggested by the participants in this study.

Good Teachers Understand How Students Learn and Care About Where They Are Coming From

Most directly, participants emphasized that good teachers understood how they learned (8/19)—and cared about their lives beyond school, including interests, problems, and goals (12/19). As Damon representatively explained, good teachers “acknowledge my needs and do their best to accommodate.” Put another way, participants described teachers' abilities to *take their perspectives*—and to understand how students' thinking, feeling, learning preferences, and lived realities are intimately entwined with their experiences in school. C.J., for instance, offered teachers the following suggestion:

Try to understand the students' point of view. My parents always say, 'I'd like you to walk a mile in my shoes,' so...try to take that advice. Try to see things from both sides. Try to show more compassion.

Ultimately, as Olive explained, students felt that

when students say they're really struggling with something—no matter what it is—whether [or not] it's school related, but it's getting in the way of them being able to do the work...I feel like they [teachers] should consider that before anything.

This strong emphasis on understanding and caring for students' perspectives echoes findings about the role of teacher empathy in student engagement and achievement (e.g., Aness, 2000; Coffman, 1981; Faircloth, 2012; Morgan, 1984) as well as culturally relevant pedagogy

(e.g., Berman, 2004; Friend & Caruthers, 2012; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983; Lee, 2007; Noguera, 2007). Indeed, as Mendes (2003) described, a teacher's deep, genuine empathy for students is one of the most powerful ways to demonstrate care, motivate interest, and promote achievement for all students in schools—but especially for students who are struggling or underperforming. Similarly, Hansen (2001) recognized that a teacher's intellectual *and* moral attentiveness—meaning his or her dual and complementary focus on “what students know, feel, and think about the subject matter” as well as “students’ responses to opportunities to grow as persons” (p. 10)—as the “common ground” of good practice, regardless of grade level or subject matter.

Good Teachers Do Not Give Up On Students

Relatedly, nearly half of the participants (8/19) described good teachers as evincing both patience and persistence in the face of student challenges. Rather than glossing over students’ difficulties or compartmentalizing their problems as justifications for failure, good teachers—according to these participants—“didn’t give up” on students, and chose to support and challenge them to do more. Reminiscent of Kleinfeld’s (1975) concept of “warm demanders” (p. 329)—a concept that itself finds echo in more recent characterizations of “critical care” (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006, p. 409) and communal academic press (Shouse, 1996)—students, like Frederick, valued teachers who caringly “kept pushing forward” and didn’t let students slip through the proverbial cracks. These teachers, as other researchers have noted, can effectively blend a personal, supportive approach with high expectations—and can thus enable students to recognize the deep regard implicit in their push for success (e.g., Becker & Luthar, 2002; Gay, 2010; Patterson, Beltyukova, Berman, & Francis, 2007; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Ware, 2006). Moreover, participants’ descriptions of good teachers’ abilities to remain in place as fluid

supports over time parallel developmental discussions of “meeting people where they are” while gently stretching their capacities as a support to growth (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012; Kegan, 1982; Winnicott, 1965).

On the other hand, some teachers, according to these participants, chose only to “see” or care about *particular* students. “I think some teachers...just come to teach,” Frederick further explained, “and the students that pass, pass, and the students that don’t pass, don’t.” Although it wasn’t *exactly* that these teachers gave up, he continued, “they showed that they didn’t have the time, or [that] there were other students they were worried about.” Sadly, he felt that many of his teachers in his earlier school career had been “focused on the stars of the day”—a description he dishearteningly felt did not include him at the time.

Good Teachers See Potential Beyond First Impressions

Related to both these ideas—and the most frequently mentioned aspect of caring for and understanding students (15/19 participants named this)—was the importance of seeing *beyond* potentially negative first impressions of when working with at-risk youth. While the literature confirms the importance of valuing students as individuals and persons (e.g., Aness, 2003; Conchas, 2001; Rodriguez, 2008, 2012; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994), this fundamental seeing of students—and their potential—was especially important to the participants I learned from given their prior (negative) experiences in school. As Frederick explained, capturing this idea, “I think that everyone should be given a fair chance, right? [Teachers need to] look past the first impressions...[but] few people rarely do that.” As Mark similarly explained, good teachers look carefully and caringly to “see the golden heart that’s inside” struggling students, and make an effort to reach out to—and support—those positive, fragile, and earnest parts of the students in their care.

Again, these participants' ideas resonate strongly with what we know about the effect of teachers' expectations—both positive and negative—on students' performance, acceptance, and well-being (e.g., Cohen & Lotan, 1995; Hughes, 2011; Rodriguez, 2012; Rosenthal, 2003). As I will describe in further detail below, there is something incredibly powerful that happens when a student is genuinely seen and appreciated by a teacher, and something heartbreakingly terrible that happens when they are not. Beautifully straightforward and remarkably complex, the teacher recognition that participants named as most meaningful involved an investment of time to learn about students and a willingness, simply, to see the good and the potential within them. Noting the hectic pace of most school environments, however, Matt realized this was not always an easy thing for most teachers to do. Wisely, and in light of this, he offered the following important distinction: "I'm not saying a bad teacher would [necessarily] be someone who doesn't get to know you—but someone who doesn't *want* to get to know you."

Participants' Identity Stories: From Invisibility to Growth Through Recognition

While all of the participant descriptions presented above confirm the importance of caring for, understanding, and knowing students (concepts that have been discussed extensively in the literature), my accounting does not, I fear, convincingly capture the weight and great meaning participants attributed to their experiences of being *seen*. Because of this, I would like, in this next section, to share some of the important stories they offered through an identity-based lens. While, as noted in Chapter 2, adolescence has been well-documented as a critical time of identity development and formation (e.g., Erikson, 1968, 1980; Faircloth, 2009; Marcia, 1980; Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006), these participants' stories of growth went far beyond selecting an occupation, planning for college, or developing talents and interests (although these, of course, were important facets of their experiences). In addition to these, for instance, they spoke about

the process of cultivating a true sense of self—of embracing and growing a spark within that felt to them at once genuine and valuable.

While I recognize that the concept of a coherent or authentic self is widely debated in some circles (e.g., Allan, 1997; Anderson, 1997; Gergen, 1990), I argue that this controversy is beyond the scope of this discussion given my interest in presenting participants' descriptions of their thinking and feeling. Moreover, their emphasis on selfhood aligns with a longstanding philosophical sentiment that each of us has a unique way of being human. Taylor (1991), for instance, located the intellectual seeds of authenticity in the late eighteenth century, in the ideas of thinkers like Rousseau and Herder, who built off earlier notions of individuality championed by Descartes and Locke. He described this idea, which he argued has “entered very deep into modern consciousness” (p. 28), with the following first-person account:

There is a certain way of being human that is *my* way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's. But this gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for *me*. (p. 28-29)

As I will describe below, these participants' prior school-based learning did not typically prioritize such self-cultivation, actualization, or acceptance. Rather, dominant paradigms of outcomes-based education and the pressures of traditional school environments often (unintentionally) left these participants feeling less important than the academic content they were trying to master and/or overshadowed by their more “successful” peers. Indeed, these participants' stories offer an up-close look at the struggles toward voice and self that largely defined their school experiences—and that illustrate, as well, the critical importance of being seen by others as a support to positive identity formation. In this way, these findings both extend and complement the literature about knowing and caring for students—and give further shape

and life, as well, to the concept of authentic teaching in the alternative school context (e.g., Cranton & Carusetta, 2004).

Accordingly, in the sections that follow, I present participants’

- Descriptions of feeling overlooked or lost in school (15/19) as a result of perceived anonymity (11/19), the stigma of a negative reputation (7/19), the intentional hiding of oneself for self-protection (6/19), and/or the “loss” of self amidst overwhelming challenges (5/19);
- Accounts of being seen and recognized by good teachers (13/19); and
- Stories of personal growth and positive identity development resulting from teachers’ recognition and acceptance (13/19).

By way of reminder, I will be using students’ pseudonyms as I relate stories except in cases where doing so might compromise confidentiality. Likewise, as mentioned earlier, counts reflect the number of participants who shared these ideas independently of any prompt from me, and do not imply the disagreement of others.

The Disappearing Student: Feelings of Anonymity, Misjudgment, and Loss of Self

For fifteen of the nineteen participants in this study (15/19), school, at its worst, was a place where they felt alone and unseen. Without, in many cases, the support of teachers or peers, students were left adrift to manage the complex challenges they faced both in and out of schools.

Anonymity and invisibility in schools. For eleven participants (11/19), this prior disconnection took the form of feeling anonymous or invisible in school. As Gina shared of her earlier public school experience:

I just felt like another number. I didn’t feel like I had any identity whatsoever. The teachers would constantly ask me my name, even months [after] being there. I don’t know, I just felt like a number. I didn’t like it.

In ways that are painful to consider, Gina's account closely resembles Charlie's:

No one there [at the public school] really liked me very much. I didn't connect. It was just an unpleasant place to be.

And Mark's:

My grades were terrible, and I honestly felt like there was no one in the world who could help me out. I felt like I was really just alone. There was just nobody for me.

And Katy's:

No one really knew what I was going through.... I didn't get that chance to connect with anyone, with teachers.

Yet, while some participants described quietly withdrawing to the back of their classrooms under the weight of such invisibility, others' experiences of going unnoticed extended also to times when they expressly needed or asked teachers for help. Travis, for instance, explained that when he was really "slipping down the slope" and struggling in school, his former teachers "did not even try to catch [him]"—and he eventually landed, temporarily, in a hospital setting. Olive, too, described the hard time she experienced getting teachers to help her: "They never even tried to help me when I asked for help or when they saw me in the worst mood possible. Every single day they would avoid me." Another participant (pseudonym withheld for confidentiality) confided the disappointment and rejection he felt after entrusting a teacher with the novel he was writing as a middle schooler: "I gave it [the manuscript] to my English teacher because I was hoping she could help me. I wanted to get into a writing contest. I needed help. And she never responded to me." When I asked him what the teacher said or did after he gave her the book, he explained unhappily:

She asked me one question about how long it took me to write. And I told her, 'It took me half a year.' And that was it. She never helped me out even though I asked her for it. And I never spoke to her since.... For a while it was so hard for

me to hand in my work to anybody because I was afraid nobody would help me out.

Albeit unintentionally, many of these participants' teachers repeatedly made them feel like they didn't matter or weren't good enough—simply because they did not take the time to stop and care for them in ways that they could feel and understand. Many participants, like Jack, complained that former teachers “never listened,” even in the midst of ongoing teasing and bullying. After a physical altercation that left him slumped on the floor, for instance, his pain was intensified because no one, from Jack's perspective, seemed to care: “No one,” he shared sadly, “stopped to help me.”

The burden of misjudgments. Seven of the nineteen participants in this study (7/19) described a related feeling of being *mis*-seen by teachers and others in their schools. As C.J. explained, describing this shared feeling, many of his former teachers never “really” saw him and what he could offer because “all they saw was negativity.” As he added, “I feel like I'm being noticed when I don't want to be noticed, but I'm not being noticed by anybody when I want or need to be noticed.” Like C.J., the six other participants who felt this way described experiences of being judged unfairly or inaccurately, perhaps because of prior negative interactions—or even, at times, for reasons they were not aware of. As Mark, for instance, explained of one teacher early in his school career who took an inexplicable disliking to him:

She seemed to have hope for everyone else except me. And I don't know why....
She never even told me to have a good summer. I've never spoken to her for
anything like that, not anything.... I felt very ignored.

Frederick, too, described teachers who “didn't give [him] a chance at the beginning.” They “didn't want to look past and see what I could do,” he explained—yet, when I asked him if he had any idea why they might have felt that way, he answered immediately and despondently,

“No.” “I mean, like, you’re a teacher,” he continued rhetorically, “so you have to make it seem like you like everyone, right?”

Others from this group of seven, however, attributed teachers’ negative assumptions about them to their prior troubles in schools. Matt, for instance, recalled teachers who would just look at him and decide, “He’s a troublemaker. He’s not a good kid.” Travis, too, remembered teachers who were “dead set on what type of person” he was, no matter how hard he tried—and this type of misjudgment generated feelings of antagonism for some students that were hard to get past. As Bob explained, he used to react quickly to his teachers’ negative assumptions by thinking, simply, “If you’re going to be against me, I’m going to be against you.” As he further explained, his “low tolerance” for judgmental teachers created a barrier to his work with them that lasted over time. “There [were] a few [teachers] that gave me a wrong look,” he explained, “and I never spoke to them.”

A false or hidden self. Six of the nineteen participants (6/19) also described in their reflections an experience of putting on a defensive “mask” to protect themselves from rejection in schools—from both students and teachers. For example, one participant (pseudonym masked for confidentiality) described the persona he adopted in an effort to gain a modicum of acceptance at his school. “I felt really distanced from everyone,” he explained, “and I didn’t talk to anyone during classes. I just got really weird.... I got tired of feeling so separated.” Citing an example of this, he continued:

I wore a bathrobe to school once or twice just to wear them.... It was one of the few ways someone would actually acknowledge that I was there.... I didn’t know what else to do to get people to notice me. I felt like there was something wrong with me, like I wasn’t open enough.... [I felt like] the only reason that I felt this seclusion from everything was because I wasn’t doing something.

When I asked him if his feelings of distance extended to his teachers as well, or if they ever did anything to help, he answered matter-of-factly, “Well, teachers never said much to me.”

Elaborating further on his experience, he added:

I guess I felt like I had to become the practical joker. If I couldn't be 'in' with everyone, I'd be out in a good way. I'd be the one everyone points to and says, 'That guy's funny.' Something that would stand me out in a crowd...[but not] in a way that makes you say, 'Who looks alone?' I didn't want to be alone.... [I didn't want to be] in the spotlight because I couldn't be in the spotlight, [but I wanted] something so that they'd recognize me. 'Hey, I'm here! Look at this crazy thing I can do!' That's what it was. I was the rowdy one. I was the little trouble maker. I was loud.... Everyone kind of knew me as 'that really weird kid.' I didn't know it then, but [I did] all that to try to get people to notice me more, [and] it probably just pushed them further away because of how weird I was acting.

While this participant was able to look back on his earlier actions with a new perspective, he explained that—at the time—he internalized much of the rejection and negativity he experienced at school:

I not only felt that I didn't belong in the school, but I didn't feel that I belonged with my friends. I didn't feel that I was funny enough, or nice enough to be their friend anymore. I didn't eat a lot either, because I started getting really self-conscious about my look. I thought that my looks were also a part of why people didn't like me.

Rather than considering that his school environment “wasn't the [right] place” for him, this participant blamed himself for his isolation because he couldn't imagine a different way of schooling or a different option for himself.

In a similar way, another participant (pseudonym also withheld) shared her painful story of adopting a defensive persona earlier in her school career. “I was shy, but I was also kind of like a tough girl,” this participant explained—before adding, emphatically, “but I could never hit anyone.” In this student's case, unkind classmates began to spread rumors about her—that she “beat up a bunch of people, or, like, killed someone.” Because of this, she adopted a “really

intense face” that she would hold throughout the day. “I wouldn’t change my expression,” she explained—and she did this to keep others at bay. “Because the other people already assumed I was violent,” she explained, “I just did that so they’d kind of leave me alone. Like, if I looked annoyed or angry, they’d not mess with me.... There were already rumors going around, so I just decided to follow with it.” Like the participant in the prior example, this student was, for a time, overcome by the façade, although she too was able to move past and beyond it. As she explained, “I guess for a while I became that person, but then I realized it wasn’t really me.”

While, sadly, there are other stories I could share here, I would like to close this discussion of outwardly adopting a “false” self with an example from one more participant (pseudonym withheld), who fashioned himself before his alternative school enrollment as “the Goth, the kid in black.” Describing this difficult time in his life, he offered the following: “I became very moody. I wore nothing but black clothing.... I started wearing everything skull and bones.” Yet, he continued, “I was never [really] gothic. It was just a kind of ‘keep away from me’ sign.... If people were too scared to even look at me, they would stay far away from me.” Moreover, his clothing provided him with a kind of protection—a barrier between himself and the rest of the world. “I felt like it was almost a comfort blanket around me,” he explained. “I was so ashamed to be there [at school] that I used to wear very long clothing.” As he continued:

I used to hide my face like this [demonstrates with his hood] every single day. The only part of my face you would see was my nose and my mouth. Sometimes not even that. I’d just go like this [pulls his hood over his eyes].... For like a year I never walked into school without that jacket or that hood over my face. The only times I would take it off was when the principal would walk down the hall and scream, ‘Take that hood off your head!’ I would literally go to him every time, pull off the hood, and the second he goes off, it went right back on.

A feeling of losing oneself. Reflecting back on the effects of such stress, five participants (5/19) explicitly described a feeling of *losing* themselves, or slipping farther and

farther away from the people they felt they were. The participant in the last example, for instance (who wore his Gothic clothing as a “comfort blanket”), looked back on his upsetting times in school and said, “I wasn’t even myself anymore.” Paco, too, found that he had moved far away from the person he felt he “really” was during his lowest times in school. As he explained:

I wasn’t in the right state of mind at all. I couldn’t think straight. Like, my sleeping patterns were off. I would go to sleep at three and wake up at four-thirty. Couldn’t go back to sleep. I would just stay up. I felt disturbed in a way. Like, I didn’t feel like myself.... I felt like a completely different person. I was filled with anger, depression, and anxiety. Like, not looking forward to the next day.... I wasn’t happy at all.

As I will share next, all of these feelings—of anonymity, misjudgment, or a disguised or lost self—stand in sharp contrast to participants’ descriptions of being *seen*, genuinely and hopefully, by teachers.

The Power of Recognition

Related to participants’ unanimous confirmation of the importance of being known and cared for, thirteen (13/19) explicitly described the power of being *seen* by teachers—of being recognized *authentically* as worthwhile, valuable, and capable human beings. While a number of scholars have documented the importance of recognition in education (e.g., Bingham, 2001, 2006; hooks, 1994; Rodriguez, 2012; van Manen, 1996), these participants’ sharings—in concert with the negative experiences described above—offer a powerful illustration of the interconnection of recognition and identity described by Taylor (1994):

Our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by *misrecognition* of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society *mirror back to them* a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. (p. 27)

As a number of these participants' stories illustrate, others' negative reflections can actually become internalized, or "interiorized" as Taylor (1991) described it (p. 50). Yet, as I share below, these participants' stories also provide an up-close-and-personal account of the affirming (and potentially life-changing) power of others' positive recognition—and accordingly add a rich, student-generated description of both sides of recognition to the literature.

Keith, for instance, located the source of much of his academic and personal improvement in the welcoming recognition of his alternative school's administrator. "Well, he saw—I guess he saw something in me that not many people did," he explained. "He saw something in me that got him excited to have me in the school." Moreover, for Keith, this experience of being *seen* translated to his interactions with alternative school peers and teachers as well:

When I came [to the alternative school], they saw there's more to this kid than what we see. I think the teachers noticed that too. This kid really wants to fit in. He really wants to be a part of something, but he's holding himself back because he doesn't feel like he can fit in anywhere.

Keith's story echoed many others', like Bob's account of a teacher who kept him motivated and engaged. "I think she sees hope in me," he explained. Paco, too, appreciated the confidence he absorbed from one of his alternative school teachers, and told me, "She can tell I have potential." For Charlotte, being seen put her in a better position to learn. As she explained, "I just feel happy, appreciated—like what I want to do means something for the teacher." For others, like, Jack, recognition lifted a much heavier weight. Describing what it felt like when, in the midst of his bullying and depression, one teacher in his prior school setting noticed his distress and talked with him about it between class periods, he said, "I felt like there was at least one person who wasn't trying to step on me. It was pretty amazing."

Another participant (pseudonym withheld for confidentiality) likewise offered a compelling story about the power of recognition in relation to his homosexuality. After dealing, for years, with anger related to hiding this important part of himself from others, he was able to “hint towards it” to a trusted staff member at his alternative school, “and she caught it.” As he explained, “She understood, and she didn’t judge me....She guessed at some of the reasons why I was angry.” Because, as this participant put it, he “couldn’t just say, ‘I’m gay,’” this staff member’s understanding and recognition helped to foster a similar kind of acceptance within himself. As this participant further shared:

Well, I wanted to be myself. So I came out to [the staff member]...[and] I told everybody I was gay here [in the alternative school], and I realized they didn’t care. Like, it didn’t matter [to them in a bad way]. Can you imagine a teenage person going through something really, really, really emotional and difficult without any friend and without anybody...to support me? That was me. I mean, I had to deal with so much emotional problems all alone that entire year.... [But] I finally got myself together thanks to...what I’ve learned here.... I realize my school accepts me, so there’s no place I’d rather be. I feel accepted here for who I am.

As I describe in greater detail below, other participants, too, explained that the experience of being seen and understood by teachers fueled important and positive transformations. Yet, as many explained, growth and self-acceptance weren’t gifts that teachers *bestowed* upon students through the act of recognition. Rather, they were goals students found themselves working toward, inspired, in part, by the caring support and understanding of good teachers. As Neil described it, “Teachers light the spark. I was the fuse and they just had to light it, I guess.” Looking back on his own experiences and the positive changes he made within and for himself, he added, “It was exactly what I needed.”

Stories of Growth and Self-Acceptance

The privilege of a lifetime is to become who you really are.
– Carl Jung

It is with great pleasure and admiration that I now describe, here, participants' stories of personal growth and self-acceptance that they attributed, at least in part, to their teachers and time in alternative schools. In keeping with the discussion of recognition, above, and also psychological understandings of identity development as situated within relationships and contexts (e.g., Bandura, 1993; Faircloth, 2012; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Schachter, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978), thirteen of these participants (13/19) shared powerful stories about finding or reconnecting with their “selves” through the support of teachers and others in their school communities.

While current constructions of educational excellence tend to prioritize measurable outcomes and student achievement as the most important markers of teacher and school quality, these participants' stories reaffirm the integral role that good teachers can—and need to—play in supporting at-risk (and, I would argue, *all*) students' psychosocial and psychoeducational well-being. Indeed, as these participants explained, the affirmation, recognition, and acceptance they felt in their new settings made possible, in large part, the academic and social improvements described in Chapter 4. Similarly, as other scholars have noted, these experiences may also have important implications for improving student engagement and behavior (Gross & John, 2003; Faircloth, 2012; Meyer & Turner, 2006) and for reducing violence in schools (Greene, 2005). Yet, perhaps even more fundamentally, these thirteen participants' stories demonstrate the foundational importance coming to know that, no matter what came before, *who they were mattered* in school—and that there were teachers they could trust with their feelings, hopes, fears, and deeply treasured aspirations.

Harlan, for instance, looked back on his time in his alternative school as a journey of finding himself, and of being seen as he wanted to be. Echoing the other twelve participants who felt this way, he explained:

I have become an actual student and an actual person here [at the alternative school], not a dramatic kid who always feels the need to be suspended.... That's just who this school has changed me to be—the real person that I am, that passionate, helpful [person]. I just can't believe it when I look back.... I could tell that something's changed. And it's this school.... I just can't put words to describe how much I love my life now, thanks to this school.

Harlan recognized, too, that he was able to make these changes because of the support he received from teachers and others in the alternative program:

I realized that they [his alternative school teachers] will never judge me, and that they are always there for me. And then I realized that I am who I am, and I can't let people stop me. I only realized these things through somebody helping me...because of the confidence they helped me gain, knowing that I always had somewhere to fall if I ever had to. And I'd be helped up [if I fell down].

Also emphasizing the importance of trusted others when making any kind of meaningful change in life, Bob recalled his earlier efforts to make improvements on his own—improvements that, though well-intentioned, didn't seem to stick. As he explained:

It's always been, like, how do I change? Don't get me wrong, I've tried it, but how long would it last for?... It's just like trying to change your handwriting. One day you're writing script and the next day you're writing regularly. How long will it last for? You'd end up going back to your old ways anyway, right? It's something that just sort of fades away.

However, with the support of the teachers in his alternative school, Bob found himself where he wanted to be—and back on track for graduation. He was able, for instance, to make a shift from posturing as “that cool kid” who didn't care about school, and could acknowledge now—at least sometimes—that his schoolwork did matter. As he described, “Well, for me, I *do* care about the class. I care about what the teacher's teaching.” Putting it another way, he added, “It's just like, you go from being somebody you're not to somebody you are.”

Similarly, Mark explained that his teachers provided the “extra wings” he needed to feel good about himself and his potential. As he further described, “This school kind of helps you [accept yourself] slowly, because every day, I find myself opening up a little more. And I don’t wanna be somebody else. I wanna be myself here.” In a parallel way, Keith shared the story of how his own alternative school experience supported his growth and self-acceptance:

I think now, because of [the alternative school], I’ve split off into my own person [The school] has just turned me into someone I probably would not be unless I had the experiences I’ve had here. . . . It’s more of a personal evolution that they give you here. You grow into the person that you want to be because this school lets you.

Appreciating that his experience was something very special and important, he added, “Not everyone is really given that kind of freedom, to have room to grow as well as learn.” While Keith acknowledged that his story was still unfolding, he was grateful for the opportunity to have come as far as he did with the help of his school community. “I’m still learning,” he shared, “but I’m hoping what I’ve learned so far is a good standing ground to keep moving forward.”

Ultimately, for participants like Keith, their alternative school experiences were fundamentally about accumulating the tools they needed to stand, confidently and comfortably, on their own—knowing that they had a network of support behind them. More than passing any particular test, or mastering any particular content, learning in these schools was really about finding *oneself*—about finding one’s way amidst the hustle of requirements, the din of competing voices, and the often excruciating trials of adolescence. Olive, for instance, shared that she now felt optimistic about her future, and grateful for the help she received: “I feel like I’ll be okay in college,” she explained confidently. “It won’t be like starting middle school or starting high school. I feel like I’ve really matured.” Indeed, Olive offered a powerful

summation of her newfound sense of self and the ways teachers helped her “just feel a lot better about” herself:

After being here....I just realized that it didn't really matter if I fit in or not. You know what I'm saying? There are other people like me out there, and they struggle [too].... Like that Dr. Seuss quote, 'Why fit in when you were born to stand out?' I'm okay with being different. I just wish I realized that sooner.

Inspiringly, these thirteen (13/19) participants' stories of personal growth and development suggest the incredible power and potential of being seen and valued, authentically, by teachers. Indeed, as Hansen (2001) similarly explained, education—in its truest sense—can help students to “broaden and deepen the persons they are,” and good teachers may find themselves in a position to “nurture that process in uncountable ways” (p. 57).

Pedagogical Connections

In this section, I present six pedagogical takeaways suggested by these participants' emphases on the importance of being *seen*. While, as I shared above, participants focused primarily on interactions with teachers that went beyond traditional instruction, their stories nevertheless highlighted a number of key strategies used by teachers to demonstrate authentic recognition in practice. I offer these strategies here, then, to extend prior learnings from the literature (e.g., Deci, Hodges, Pierson, & Tomassone, 1992; Newmann, Marks, & Gamoran, 1995, 1996; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989)—and as a step toward further imagining how this kind of seeing can manifest in classrooms and schools. While certainly not an exhaustive list, I include these ideas here as examples—and as possible points of departure for future research.

Strategy 1: Incorporate/Build Upon Student Interests

Prior research suggests that students are most motivated to learn when the work at hand is genuinely significant or meaningful for them (Dewey, 1910; Newmann, Marks, & Gamoran,

1995, 1996; Noddings, 2013). For the participants I learned from, this commonly accepted idea was articulated most frequently as a teacher's ability to identify and build upon participants' interests in their lessons. As Katy advised:

Know what their [the students'] interests are. Ask what other classes they're taking, what they're really interested in. Really pay attention to things like that. I also feel like that can help teaching. Like, if you know their interests, you can help relate the lesson to them.

Strategy 2: Differentiate Instruction to Meet Student Needs

Many participants in this study also recognized—as have many others in a variety of contexts (e.g., Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012; Levy, 2008; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006)—that good teachers teach different students *differently*. As Charlotte representatively explained, “People learn in different ways. You have to show us in different angles. You have to think ahead of time, ‘How can I make this work for this class?’” While a thorough discussion of differentiation techniques is beyond the scope of this summary, differentiation—for these participants—commonly involved instructional pacing and/or teaching style. As Charlotte explained:

You have to try to appeal to all the different students that you have, like the ones who learn individually, the ones who are vested in learning, and the ones who are less than vested. You have to try to think from the perspective of everyone. Try to mix up projects and assignments so that there is something that will appeal to everyone.

Katy, too, offered a description of how her math teacher met her pace as an individual within a larger class:

Math is my favorite subject, [but in my old school] we would be on one topic for a really long time and I would want to move on, and I wouldn't be able to because some people were a little behind. But then with other topics, I really didn't get it. And they [teachers] would have to move on to the next topic, and I was just stuck.... But here [at the alternative school], I could be wherever I am.

Strategy 3: Offer Flexible Opportunities for “Open” Learning

In contrast to more standardized, prescribed approaches to teaching and curricula that seem to be on the rise (Au, 2007; Cuban, 2009; Goodman, 2013), good teachers—according to the participants I learned from—offer students meaningful, authentic opportunities to shape the focus and flow of their own learning. Unlike more commonly employed forms of choice that teachers sometimes offer (e.g., picking a seat, a partner, or an option from a pre-determined menu of topics—although these can be valuable) (Bozack, Vega, McCaslin, & Good, 2008; Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, & Turner, 2004), participants appreciated occasional opportunities to influence the focus or discussion of the class. The kinds of lessons where students worked to find the one right answer or follow a rigid script felt too “closed” and limiting, they shared. As Charlie explained, “[In those kinds of classes] I feel less compelled to contribute because the teacher seems to have it all—not under control, but planned out.” Travis, too, lamented teachers that seemed to “have an answer before you even pose the question.” On the other hand, Keith appreciated teachers, like his social studies teacher, who stop—even though they have “this whole plan for the class”—to “hear what the kids have to say.” Even if it gets them a little bit “off track,” Keith explained, in the end it will “contribute more than a lecture in the class” because it will move students “further in their understanding” of the material.

Strategy 4: Treat All Students Well

While the participants in this study clearly cared deeply about how they were treated by teachers in school—eleven (11/19) expressly described paying close attention to how *others* were treated as well. Underscoring an important component of identity-affirming teacher practice, these participants seemed to feel that, as one participant put it, there should be “no

outsider in a classroom.” Remembering some of her best teachers, for instance, Olive explained, “It wasn’t just me that they stood up for. . . . If there was anyone being mean to anyone they would stick up for them.” Moreover, observing teachers’ interactions with other students was one of the first ways participants could “size up” or “feel out” new teachers. As Gina explained, when she first toured her alternative program as a potential enrollee, she became convinced that it could work for her because of the positive way teachers treated students in the school. As she explained, “I saw how they interacted with the other students, and. . .immediately felt I could like every one of them [the teachers].”

Strategy 5: Keep At It

Related to participants’ resentment of teachers who seemed to give up on them or others—or teachers who, as one student put it, just “come and go” in and out of their lives—some participants also described the importance of *persisting* in the face of perceived student resistance. While it may not always be clear to teachers that they are getting through to students or making a difference, these students explained that the simple act of showing up, day after day, helps teachers communicate to students the value and potential they see in them. As Frederick explained, describing a teacher who he and his classmates sometimes gave “a hard time”:

He’ll get mad but he’ll stick to it. Like he won’t. . .quit. He still thinks we can all pass the class. I know I can pass the class, but still, it means something. I don’t tell him, but it does mean something that he comes to class outgoing and ready.

Strategy 6: Stop And Notice

Perhaps most central to a teacher’s identity-affirming pedagogy, however (from these participants’ perspectives), is the courage and willingness to stop and notice when something important is going on for a student—be it positive, negative, or anything in between. As Jack explained:

I definitely think most students that go to alternative program schools have their own personal problems, but [teachers should]...try to figure out what's the problem. Try to help them get around it. Don't...[just ask], 'Are you ok?'...and let them walk away. Be like, 'Are you sure? Because I've noticed you're not yourself. I just want to make sure everything is alright. If you need anything come see me.' Most kids wouldn't, but it's nice to know someone said that to you.

Paco, too, emphasized that taking a quick moment to connect with a student could inspire him or her in ways teachers may not even realize. As he described:

You don't know what happens behind that shade of his [the student's] face. Like, for all you know, he could be just hurting inside, or he could be distracted from something that happened with him that week. He could be upset, or anything like that. Maybe that one 'You can do it. I believe in you,' or that one pat on the back...can inspire him to start getting on the track that he needs to get on.

Ultimately, for all of the participants I learned from, the importance of looking beyond students' "shades"—of caring, deeply, for their dignity and internal experiences (as well as demonstrating that care in practice)—was the cornerstone of what it meant to “see” these students in ways that they could feel. As Katy explained, summarizing her own thinking and also capturing this shared sentiment:

I feel like [what]...I've been saying is that...everyone is different, and everyone learns in different ways and has different things going on for them—going on with their lives besides in school. And, you know, in other schools, they don't know to take account for that, but here [at the alternative school], what happened [before] is kind of what it's all about, so I think that's what really makes it great.

Chapter Summary & Conclusion

In this chapter, I overviewed the three big themes about good teachers that I drew from participants' sharings—including the critical importance of (a) seeing students, (b) genuinely sharing one's self as a teacher, and (c) mutual, authentic relationships—which constitute, respectively, the foci of my three findings chapters. I also discussed how, together, these themes help to extend Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) model of authentic teaching to the alternative high

school context. The majority of this chapter, however, focused on these participants' powerful understandings of feeling *seen* by teachers as a critical support to their learning and identity development. While many of their ideas echoed broad teachings from the student care and student-centered teaching literature, their stories of school-related identity development afforded a closer look at what this kind of recognition and understanding *meant to* and *felt like* for students. Indeed, their descriptions of the ways teachers served as facilitators or inhibitors of growth by either affirming or denying recognition expanded the discussion in important ways, and lent credence to the fundamental importance of affirming the dignity, worth, and potential of students as a support to learning—particularly for students at-risk of educational failure. Toward this end, I concluded this chapter with a brief discussion of six pedagogical takeaways for identity-affirming teacher practice that highlighted and wove together participants' suggestions and examples.

Just as Hansen (2001) acknowledged, however, it is important to remember that “no teacher anywhere has ever fully succeeded in recognizing all students' distinctiveness and in supporting all students' intellectual and moral flourishing” (p. 12). Rather, like him, I argue that the ideas presented in this chapter can serve instead “as a source of guidance, direction, and inspiration” for teachers considering and growing their own practice (p. 12). Likewise, and as I will argue in the next chapter, these ideas similarly raise up the importance of honoring the diversity of teacher selves. Indeed, as no single person can be everything to everyone, allowing room for *difference* in teacher practice improves the odds of all students finding at least one adult with whom they can connect authentically—an important and long-standing developmental understanding (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1986; Thompson, 1998), and a powerful, relational support that has shaped learning and lives throughout history (Cusick, 2005).

Accordingly, in the next chapter, I turn the focus to participants' descriptions of the critical—and parallel—importance of an authentic teacher self. While a number of scholars and thinkers have argued that teachers—and the evolving identities they bring to the classroom—can and should play an important role in learning and instruction (e.g., Dewey, 1938; Greene, 1978; Moustakas, 1959; Palmer, 2007; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994), this is the first study, to my knowledge, that makes this argument directly from the perspectives of students. Moreover, while the emphasis on cultivating and honoring teacher selfhood in instruction stands, in many ways, in sharp contrast to historical and contemporary constructions of K-12 teaching as a largely selfless enterprise, it seems important—given the indisputable importance of serving all students well—to listen to these participants' unique and valuable accounts of what helped them to successfully re-engage with school.

Chapter VI

BRINGING ONESELF TO THE CLASSROOM: PARTICIPANTS' SHARINGS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING WITH SELF

The inimitable Fred Rogers once said, “One of the greatest gifts you can give anybody is the gift of your honest self. I also believe that kids can spot a phony a mile away.” In this chapter, I make a similar argument, focusing on participants’ descriptions of the essential role of selfhood and authenticity in teachers’ practice—or what I’m calling *teaching with self*. Indeed, mirroring participants’ emphasis on the importance of feeling seen by teachers, which I described in Chapter 5, most of the participants in this study (16/19) named the opportunity to see and know their teachers as real and genuine people as an important and complementary support to their learning. While, as I discussed in Chapter 2, historical and contemporary constructions of teaching often demand a teacher’s *selflessness*—through the valorization of distanced objectivity and/or bottomless altruism—these participants’ sharings help illuminate their deep appreciation for a wholly present, knowable, *invested* adult as a classroom leader, model, and facilitator of learning.

As previously described, and as presented again in Figure 8 below, I represent this essential *visibility* of a teacher’s self within an alternative program as a prominent circle within a larger circle (the school context). While inarguably an oversimplification (and also just one piece of a larger model of authentic teaching presented in my dissertation), the image is offered as a way to spotlight teacher selfhood as an important and synergistic counterbalance to student identity. It is also a visualization of the fact that, from these participants’ perspectives, *who a teacher is and is becoming* is of critical importance in the classroom and beyond.

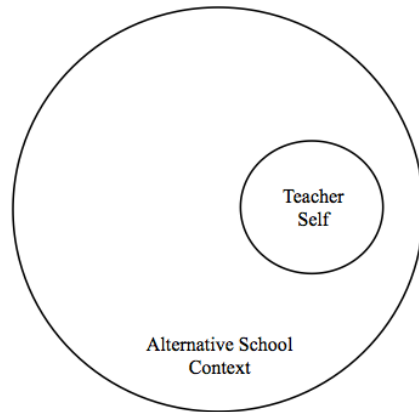


Figure 8: Teacher identity as an important component of good teaching

In order to contextualize participants’ sharings about teacher selfhood in this chapter—and also to highlight the ways their ideas extend current theory—I first revisit Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004) original discussion of teacher authenticity in higher education, as described by the twenty-two university faculty members who participated in their study. Then, I briefly reconsider how the notion of teaching with self stands, simultaneously, in alignment with long-cherished ideals of teaching (e.g., Greene, 1978; Hansen, 1993, 1995, 2001; Jackson, 1986; Moustakas, 1959, 1966)—and also in sharp contrast to dominant constructions of teaching as a selfless profession (Apple, 1983, 1985; Au, 2007; Higgins, 2003, 2011). In particular, I return to the discussion in Chapter 2 about the ways the gendered history of K-12 teaching has shaped—and often constrained—the profession for both men and women.

After this, I present participants’ reflections about the role teacher selfhood plays in their learning, beginning first with their insights about how a teacher’s externally-driven, hidden, or unsuitable self (meaning teachers for whom an alternative school teaching assignment would not be a good fit) can distort practice and limit effectiveness. I then offer, in comparison, a detailed analysis of the positive and meaningful ways these participants felt good teachers *taught with self*

(as I am calling it)—or the positive ways in which they brought themselves to their work and their classrooms. Importantly, participants also shared ideas about *why* this kind of authentic teaching was difficult for many teachers, and I share these reflections—as well as a series of takeaways for teaching with self (as suggested by participants’ stories)—at the conclusion of this chapter.

Revisiting and Extending Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004) Model: The Teacher as Self

In their discussion of authentic teaching in the university setting, Cranton and Carusetta (2004) began by recognizing the importance of “self” for the twenty-two faculty participants who took part in their research. Recommended as “authentic teachers” by colleagues and administrators, these faculty members

spoke about their awareness of themselves as people and as teachers, how they came to be a teacher, what that meant for them, their values, their passions, the conflicts they experienced between the realities of teaching and their values, and the ways in which they brought themselves as people into their practice. (p. 12)

Echoing broader definitions of authenticity that include an individual’s genuineness, congruence between values and actions, and acknowledgement of limitations (Brookfield, 1990; Cranton 2001; Palmer, 2000; Ray & Anderson, 2000), these faculty members’ emphases on the role of self in their work accord, also, with the general respect and autonomy widely enjoyed by academics (notwithstanding current trends toward increased accountability and oversight in universities, particularly in the field of teacher education [e.g., Barnett & Amrein-Beardsley, 2011; Dougherty, Natow, Bork, Jones, & Vega, 2013; Ginsberg & Kingston, 2014]). In other words, because professors are overwhelmingly recognized as *professionals*, it makes sense that these participants, who taught in a variety of disciplines, located an important source of their practice *within themselves*—within their passions, experiences, and expertise.

In the world of K-12 education, on the other hand, mounting policy mandates and unfavorable constructions of teachers increasingly encroach upon teachers' autonomy and influence, and demand that they do more—with and for less (Apple, 1983, 1986, 1995; Cuban, 2004; McNeil, 2000; Neimiec & Ryan, 2009; Santoro, 2011). For example, current educational trends (e.g., toward high-stakes testing, outcomes-based teacher evaluation systems, continual analysis of student performance data, and even scripted curricula) stress the importance of teaching as an objective, “scientific” profession, yet simultaneously subvert a teacher’s own standards of judgment—and potentially intensify, deskill, and depersonalize a teacher’s craft in ways that can make it harder to sustain (Apple, 1983, 1986; Dibbon, 2004; Hargreaves, 1992, 1994, 2001; Naylor & Shaeffer, 2003). Put another way, teachers today must navigate the contradictory but simultaneous ideals of the *objective, professional* teacher (Hargreaves, 2001; Shapiro, 2010; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003) and the *caring, altruistic* teacher (England, 2005; Higgins, 2011)—both of which challenge bringing “self” to teaching in different ways.

Indeed, just as a hyper-focus on prescribed outcomes can negatively affect students and their range and depth of learning (Au, 2007, 2011; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Diamond & Spillane, 2004; Nichols & Berliner, 2007; Ravitch, 2010), controlling accountability policies have also been linked to higher rates of teacher attrition and turnover—problems that frequently plague schools serving larger populations of lower performing, lower income, and/or minority students (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2006; Hanushek, Kain & Rivkin, 2004). In an analysis of the National Center for Education Statistics’ (NCES) Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) for 1999-2000, for instance, Lui (2007) found that first-year teachers who left the profession cited their lack of influence in schools as a top reason for their decision—even before the passage of more recent accountability legislation. Relatedly,

Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton's (2006) analysis of NCES's Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS) suggested that, among teachers who left the classroom, 65% who found jobs outside of the field of education reported enjoying a more manageable workload and an improved work-life balance. While, inarguably, standards-based reforms and other accountability measures seek to shape and guide practice in meaningful ways, they also run the risk of obfuscating teacher selfhood—and, accordingly, of pushing potentially excellent teachers out of the classroom. As Hansen (2001) warned, “both the practice of teaching and of individual teachers threatens to fall out of sight whenever people cast teaching as merely a means to an end, with that end shaped from outside the practice” (p. 2).

As I discussed in Chapter 2, many scholars argue that this tendency to control and overload teachers—to essentially overlook the inherent value and relevance of the selves teachers bring to their work—finds root in the feminization of teaching that occurred at the turn of the twentieth century (e.g., Apple, 1983, 1985; Riehl & Lee, 1996; Strober & Tyack, 1980). While teaching in the early years of the United States was largely a masculine enterprise associated with emotional control and physical dominance (Preston, 1993), changing social and economic conditions throughout the nineteenth century led to the rapid expansion and bureaucratization of the public education system—and to a new understanding of teaching as “women’s work” (Albisetti, 1993; Hoffman, 2003; Kessler-Harris, 2003; Riehl & Lee, 1996; Strober & Tyack, 1980). In response to the rapidly growing demand for teachers, as well as reformers’ emphases on women’s “natural” qualifications as nurturers and moral guides, female teachers increasingly entered the classroom—so much so that, by 1920, they held an incredible 86% of all public school teaching posts, and nearly all of the elementary school placements (Hoffman, 2003).

Yet, just as changing understandings of teachers and teaching brought new opportunities for women, so too did they correspond with increased control over teachers' work and a growing emphasis on efficiency and scientific management in schools (Apple, 1983, 1985; Riehl & Lee, 1996; Shapiro, 2010; Strober & Tyack, 1980). Early female teachers, for example, were paid significantly less for their labor than their male counterparts, and were subject to regulations governing many aspects of their personal and professional lives by a growing (and largely male) administrative bureaucracy (Apple, 1983, 1985; Strober & Tyack, 1980). In ways that find echo in the histories of many "helping" professions—like nursing and social work—individuals entering teaching at the turn of the twentieth century were expected to work tirelessly in service to others, yet submit willingly to external controls (Baldacci, 2006; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; England, 2005; Higgins, 2003, 2011).

While such "selfless" characterizations of teaching continue to influence and inform the profession—for *both* men and women today (Kliebard, 2004; Lagemann, 1997, 2000)—teachers across time and place have always resisted demands that they *withhold* or *subvert* who they are and what they believe in their work. Wallace (1973), for example, recognized that the rhetoric of feminization that precipitated early demographic shifts in the public school teaching force was more of a "moral lubricant" for staffing changes than a reflection of teachers' actual experiences and inclinations (as cited in Clifford, 1991, p. 121). Indeed, through actions both individual and collective, independent and organized, early women teachers resisted the labels and expectations placed upon them—gaining, over time, the right to pensions, equal pay, marriage while in service, and maternity leaves (Blum-DeStefano, under revision; Carter, 2002; Crocco, 1999; Doherty, 1979; Leroux, 2006; Rousmaniere, 2005; Weiler, 1998). Likewise, women educators have made important gains in terms of holding and shaping an increasing number of

administrative positions in both schools and districts (Blount, 1999; Rousmaniere, 2009; Schmuck, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1989, 1995). In spite of and in light of “identities that were socially defined as passive and self-sacrificing” (Rousmaniere, 2005, p. 57), these educators demonstrated a powerful resistance to dominant constructions of their work and lives, and made significant gains in the fight for improved working conditions and freedoms of practice for all teachers (Prentice & Theobald, 1991).

The struggle to raise up and nurture teachers’ unique perspectives and experiences continues today, too—in ways that are neither *selfless* nor *selfish*. While, like Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004) study, much of this discussion resides beyond the K-12 context, researchers are beginning to explore the ways that elementary and secondary school teachers can stand in thoughtful opposition to constraining hegemonic forces and market-based mandates that infiltrate practice in negative ways (e.g., Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Ogren, 2011). By aligning one’s self and one’s practice, for instance, with the deep roots of teaching as a person-centered endeavor (Dewey, 1938; Hansen, 1995, 2001, 2011; Jackson, 1986; Palmer, 2007; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994), teachers can manifest a counter-ethos—or “principled resistance” to prescriptive policies (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2008, p. 30)—that demonstrates and honors the value that the *person* who fills the role of teacher brings to both students and practice (Hansen, 1995, 2001; Higgins, 2011; Fenstermacher, 1999; van Manen, 1986, 1994).

Importantly, and as I will describe in greater detail in the next sections, sixteen of the nineteen student participants who took part in my research (16/19) explicitly located the source of a good teacher’s effectiveness in his or her *self*—or in the manifestations of personality, motivations, and passions that synergistically infuse a teacher’s teaching. Recognizing, like

Hansen (2001), that “the distinctive, irreproducible human being...who inhabits the role of teacher” really *mattered* to them and their learning (p. 1), these participants helped to highlight and expand upon the importance of a teacher’s self to authentic practice—and they helped to illustrate, as well, how real teachers strive to do this in the alternative school context.

The Role of Teacher Selfhood in Alternative Schools: Participants’ Reflections and Descriptions

As I shared above, sixteen of the nineteen participants in my study (16/19) expressly emphasized that *who a teacher is*—including his or her motivations, passions, values, and experiences—dramatically influenced their assessments of, reactions to, and feelings about that teacher. Just as in prior chapters, however, my count of sixteen out of nineteen (16/19) is not intended to imply that the three participants *not* mentioned here offered contrary opinions. Rather, because I invited participants to share—with very open prompts—the kinds of things they found most helpful and important about teachers, these three students simply mentioned other qualities or characteristics, which I discuss elsewhere. As always, the same holds true for all counts offered below, unless otherwise specified. Still, the fact that the vast majority of my sample *spontaneously named* some aspect of teacher selfhood as intrinsically important to good teaching seems a remarkable finding—especially since, to my knowledge, this is the first study to make this argument exclusively from the perspectives of “at-risk” student participants.

Accordingly, in the sections that follow, I overview participants’ reflections about the importance of teacher selfhood, beginning first with a discussion of the ways they felt a teacher’s unsuitable (13/19), externally-driven (10/19), or hidden (5/19) self could negatively impact effectiveness. In contrast to this, I next present participants’ sharings about the specific ways good teachers were able to bring their selves to bear in their meaningful work with students (16/19). I close this discussion of with a description of the structural, cultural, and bureaucratic

obstacles that eleven participants (11/19) named as likely impediments to teachers' wider-scale authentic practice.

Before presenting these findings, however, I would like to preface all that follows by sharing that more than half of these students (10/19) were careful to acknowledge something good in almost all of their teachers—even those who may have inadvertently let them down or hurt them in some way. A testament both to the generosity and maturity of participants, and also to the bond that even not-so-good teachers can make with students, these ten participants recognized that conditions and timing sometimes just got in the way of good teaching. As Charlie reflected, looking back at the difficult and anxious time he had in his traditional public high school, “Well, most of the staff there were incredibly supportive...and trying to help where they could. But the bureaucracy of a large school system tends to step on its own feet.” C.J., too, qualified his critiques of certain teachers by adding, “I really try not to judge anyone or anything because I know most people are dealing with something else. You benefit from trying to understand.” Ultimately, as Damon explained, even encounters with “bad” teachers challenged him in significant ways. As he realized:

Sometimes even the bad teachers taught the best, in that they made me teach myself. Which I doubt was their goal, but that's a great skill to have. In a way, I don't have any bad teachers, if you look at it that way.

With this compassionate frame of reference in mind, I share, below, participants' reflections about the ways a teacher's self—or perceived lack thereof—can negatively influence practice.

The Problematic Self: Negative or Empty Manifestations of Less-Effective Teachers

Because, like good teaching in general, teaching with self is a challenging concept to pin down, many participants (16/19) described the *inverse* as a way of making their ideas even clearer. I follow this helpful strategy and accordingly begin, here, with participants' *negative*

examples of teachers' unsuitable (13/19), externally-driven (10/19), or hidden (5/19) selves to better contextualize participants' positive sharings that follow. As I shared earlier, and as I describe in greater detail below, when discussing what I am calling a teacher's "unsuitable" self, I am referencing participants' sharings about teachers they felt would not be good fits for an alternative school setting—because of perceived character or dispositional limitations.

A teacher's unsuitable self. For thirteen participants (13/19), some teachers simply seemed unsuited to working with alternative school populations. Indeed, from their perspectives, even if unsuitable teachers were being "authentically" themselves, something about these teachers' characters or dispositions made them noticeably less effective in their work. For three participants (3/19), for instance, this idea translated simply as, "if you're a bad person or mean person, you're a mean teacher," as Harlan put it. Yet, building off of the idea that a "bad" person would somehow be a "bad" teacher, others offered more nuanced explanations about what it meant to teach with an unsuitable self, including problems that stemmed from a teacher's perceived:

- Harmful motivations to teach (6/19), or
- Disinterest or disinvestment in the work (10/19).

In all of these cases, as I will share next, participants felt that something about these teachers' selves was intrinsically out of alignment with what they needed or hoped to get from them as people, and significantly impeded their experiences of and with that teacher.

Harmful motivations. For six of the nineteen participants in this study (6/19), a teacher's excessive prioritization of his or her own power was a real mark of an unsuitable self, from their perspective. As C.J. explained, some teachers used power, authority, and control "to be mean and malicious—to be nasty." Such teachers, Gina similarly explained, "flaunt their

authority...like dictators over their classes” and can do real harm to students, and even push them further away from their learning. C.J., for instance, admitted that harsh treatment by teachers “hurts—it really does.” Gina, too, felt that teachers’ grandiose displays of power made her “not want to listen to them even more.”

Using a powerful metaphor that captured some of the conflict between participants and power-driven teachers, Mark offered the following:

A lot of teachers that I’ve taken a look at, what comes to mind is Geppetto—the guy who is the puppet maker [from *Pinnocchio*]—because he takes care of all the students like, you know, *puppets* [emphasis his].... They [students] all have their own strings and he...kind of controls them like that. But that’s kind of hard to do because, actually, the strings will intertwine with one another, and it’s hard to keep track with all the students that you know.

Moreover, he explained, students will always find ways to push back on these teachers’ attempts to dominate or overpower them:

When there’s a teacher like Geppetto, there’s always gonna be students out there who are gonna be like Pinnocchio, because they are gonna try to mess with the teachers, because that’s what students do sometimes. And eventually, Pinocchio’s nose is gonna grow and it’s gonna poke Geppetto in the eye.

Ultimately, echoing Rogers and Freiberg’s (1994) assertion that “In true teaching there is no place for the authoritarian nor for the person on an ego trip” (p. 34), these six participants agreed that teachers who are “all about control and power” (as Bob termed it) brought decidedly unsuitable manifestations of selfhood to their work with struggling students.

Disinterest or disinvestment. Just as participants resented the controlling and harmful aspects of self that some teachers brought to their classrooms, ten of the nineteen participants (10/19) described teachers’ disinterest or disinvestment in teaching as a different kind of misalignment of self. Whereas, in prior examples, teachers seemed to be driven by a hurtful desire to control or subvert students, the teachers that participants described as disinterested did

not seem, from their perspectives, to consider teaching to be worthy of much investment at all. In other words, these teachers—who may have shown up authentically in other ways—did not seem, from participants’ perspectives, to hold teaching as something central to *who they were as people*. Rather, as four participants hypothesized, these teachers may have entered or remained in the classroom exclusively “for the money”—a reason they felt was decidedly unsuitable on many levels.

Capturing some of what these ten participants (10/19) meant when describing disinterested teachers, for instance, Charlotte shared the following example from her prior school experience:

I had one teacher in sixth grade who nobody really liked because she just wasn’t interested in what she was teaching. She tried to avoid teaching as much as possible. We’d come in and she’d put textbook numbers on the board. She’d say, ‘This is what we’re doing today.’ Then she’d read off the answers at the end of class and maybe answer a few questions. But she wasn’t really interested. So nobody learned as much from her class.... You could tell that she didn’t really want to teach us the information. It was sort of like, ‘Oh, I have to come to school and teach today.’

Bob, too, had trouble learning from teachers who cared only for minimum requirements and superficial responsibilities. It was as if such teachers, he explained, walked into their classrooms and said, “This is what I need to do. I don’t have to exceed this. I don’t have to go below this.... This is what I’ll do, and I’ll leave.” As Gina also explained, it’s not enough for teachers to “just quote-unquote go in and ‘do their job.’” To be really effective—to really make a difference—she added, teachers “have to put way more into it” than that.

As all of these participants shared, teaching with an unsuitable self—because of one’s seemingly harmful motivations or disinterest—dramatically limited a teacher’s practice and effectiveness. Moreover, as disinvestment can be one reaction to the mounting pressures and responsibilities of the complex work of teaching over time (Hargreaves, 2001; Greene, 1978;

Your Permanent Record?, 2010a), these findings also suggest the critical importance of teacher renewal, as I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 8.

A teacher's externally-driven self. Ten of the nineteen participants (10/19) named teachers' externally-driven practice as a related limitation of "self" that clouded some teachers' effectiveness. As these participants explained, when teachers over-identified with externally-imposed concerns—such as the rules (7/19), the prescribed curriculum (6/19), or the approval of students and/or other teachers (5/19)—they inadvertently taught from a place of *inauthenticity*, or from a place that did not seem connected to their inner thinking and feeling in genuine or caring ways. Even if these teachers tried hard to do a good job, their unwavering and seemingly uncritical prioritization of externally-driven goals and values made it seem as if they, themselves, were somehow *missing* (in the psychological sense) from their own practice. As I will describe in greater detail below, more often than not, teachers who taught in this way felt more like organizational functionaries to participants than leaders of learning.

Below, I describe each manifestation of externally-driven practice described by participants, beginning first with teachers who were run by the rules. I then share participants' thinking about teachers who unwaveringly stuck to the prescribed curriculum, as well as teachers who seemed overly dependent on the approval of others.

Rules before people. The most frequently named example of teachers' externally-driven practice was an over-emphasis on rules and policies (7/19). In ways that made students feel less important than the rules themselves, such teachers "weren't really willing to bend the rules at all," as Charlie put it—even when students could have benefited tremendously from flexibility. While such rigidity could presumably stem from a teacher's need for power (as discussed above) or inability to see into students' perspectives and experiences (as discussed in Chapter 5, as well

as later in this chapter from a developmental perspective), these seven participants particularly resented teachers' unquestioning adoption of and identification with school rules about "things that weren't really important," as Charlotte put it.

Sometimes, participants felt that teachers themselves didn't even believe in these rules, but felt compelled to enforce them because they were expected or told to do so. Representative of others who shared this view, Jeff explained that most of the teachers he worked with in his traditional public high school enforced "all these completely nonsense rules." As he continued:

Like, [they'd say], 'Oh yeah, you can't wear a hat in class because it distracts people.' It really doesn't. Or a hood. Like, 'You can't put your hood on.' Really? You're not distracting anyone.... Some teachers have that sorta strictness where they play by the rules.

This is not to say, however, that participants felt teachers should lower their expectations or let students do as they please. On the contrary, as a group they appreciated teachers' guidance, direction, and influence—both behaviorally and academically. As one participant shared during a focus group, eliciting a series of nods and agreements from others in the room, "I feel like teachers should have laws, but they should also be flexible." While they did not frame it explicitly in this way, perhaps what they were getting at was the difference between a teacher who presents, merely, as the *embodiment* of a set of rules, and a teacher who works thoughtfully, intentionally, and *humanly* toward rules or expectations in support to all.

Curriculum above all. Just as participants struggled with teachers' unbending adherence to disciplinary rules, six of the nineteen participants (6/19) took issue with teachers who were "overly concerned with just getting their curriculum done," as Keith phrased it. Citing an example, Keith continued:

My Spanish teacher—ha! I really don't like that guy. He was just all about the learning. He did not take a moment to stop and see if anyone understood what he

was talking about. He just wanted to throw the information out. If you didn't grab it, that's your fault, 'cause he's giving it to you.

Indeed, for Keith, like the five other participants who voiced this concern, it felt like the teachers who fell into this category wanted only to “push the information into you and [make] sure you get it so you can be ready for the test next week.” Realizing, similarly, that many teachers were run by their need for students to perform well on state exams, Charlotte recognized that strong test scores were some teachers' “main goal.” When teachers seemed to feel this way, she explained, it was as if they said to her, “Well, since we have the test, you have to make sure you get this memorized and I can't really care [about] what you like. This is what you're asked to learn.” Yet, as Bob explained, such an outcome-oriented approach typically fell short for him and other students:

I mean, you could stand in front of a classroom and teach all day long, but if you never ask what the other side wants to know, or cares about, or has any questions [about], you're pretty much just talking to a blank wall.

Again, this is not to say that participants did not care about grades, or even state exams. As already mentioned in Chapter 4, participants were extremely proud of the academic progress they'd made in their alternative school programs—and of their successes on standardized tests. Yet, some participants responded negatively when teachers presented curricula and requirements as static tasks to be checked off a list—or when they acted as if performing well on a test was more of a service due back to the teacher than a milestone in students' learning.

A need for approval. Five of these nineteen participants (5/19) likewise recognized that a teacher's need for approval—from students and/or colleagues—could also warp teachers' authentic practice from the outside. Like Palmer (2007), who argued that the “need to be popular with young people...keeps us from serving our students well” (p. 50), these five participants understood that teaching to please or mimic others—either students or colleagues—was a

surefire way to leave their own unique selves out of their practice. Jack, for instance, likened some teachers' counter-productive efforts to "be like students" and gain their approval to donning a fake accent:

I think the best way to put it is, if you go to another country, you're trying to speak the way that they're speaking. Like, if I go to England...I'll be talking in a British accent...just to fit in.

Yet, thinking of a real-life friend he had in England, Jack realized that adopting such a fake accent "would drive her nuts and she would be punching me all day." As he wisely realized, teachers' "temptation" to be like students ultimately rings false, as a person can only really fit in when they're "not trying [too hard] to be like everybody else."

Jack and others shared similar wisdom for teachers "trying to be like every other teacher around." When teachers are overly "influenced by their favorite teacher," as Frederick described, or "what other teachers do" as Katy noted, it is harder to find and express a unique and personal style—a capacity participants described as central to teaching with self that I will discuss in greater detail below.

Sadly, for the ten participants who struggled with teachers' externally-driven priorities, even a teacher's best efforts could seem hollow when not offered from a place of genuine self. As Bob explained of these teachers, "I feel like, instead of them actually helping, they're just, like, *there* [emphasis his]. They're not really doing anything.... They're like a big decoration that just talks." Keith, too, lamented the perceived emptiness of some teachers' practice. "They just seem like flare [or decorative accessories]," he explained—"like they're kind of out there and trying [to help]...but they don't know how to do it."

In the end, then, these participants' sharings suggested the importance of a teacher's agency and volition—of that unique and palpable contribution each good teacher brings to his or

her practice beyond externally mandated expectations and requirements. While some teachers, according to participants, seemed to fill their selves inauthentically from without (like those described in the sections above), others—as I will describe next—seemed to purposefully or inadvertently hide who they were from students in an effort to enact the role of teacher.

A teacher’s hidden self. The last way that participants explained that a teacher’s self—or seeming lack thereof—negatively impacted their learning was in their descriptions of the façade some teachers adopted during student-teacher interactions. Indeed, five of the nineteen participants (5/19) explicitly named teachers’ *hiding* of self as an unnecessary barrier that limited their opportunities to connect with and learn from teachers. Similarly, Rogers and Freiberg (1994) recognized “hiding” as a common defense employed by teachers hoping to maintain an aura of expertise, objectivity, professional distance, and positional authority. As they explained:

It is quite customary for teachers rather consciously to put on the mask, the role, the façade of being a teacher and to wear this façade all day, removing it only when they have left the school at night. (p. 154)

Charlie offered a similar definition, explaining that “it’s a common thing for teachers to...try to separate themselves from students,...keeping the different air about themselves, an air of superiority.” Yet, as Charlie acknowledged, when teachers try to separate (or even protect) themselves from the inevitable vulnerabilities of a teacher’s work in this way, they seem “like they’re not even human sometimes.” Gina, too, felt that walling oneself off in such a way “doesn’t come naturally to anybody,” and argued that “it’s definitely a front” that teachers put on “just so that nobody will really know who they are.”

As I will discuss in greater detail below, inviting students to know “who they really were” as teachers and as persons—at least on some level—was one of the most meaningful (and difficult) ways teachers helped participants to re-connect with school, and to model the power

and beauty of a living, growing, authentic individual. As Charlie advised teachers, representing a common sentiment among participants, “Don’t pretend to be someone different.” He then added, sincerely but with a smile, “That’s the advice you always give for dating, but I think it works better for teaching.”

Carrying forward Charlie’s lighthearted but insightful advice, I next describe the ways that participants recognized and appreciated teachers’ authentic expressions of identity in their practice—or the kind of teaching that I characterize below as *teaching with self*.

The Authentic Teacher: Participants’ Reflections About the Power of Teaching With Self

What is most personal is most universal.
– Carl R. Rogers

In this section, I present participants’ reflections about the power of what I am calling *teaching with self*—or a teacher’s ability to bring his or her self into practice in meaningful and evident ways.

As I shared earlier in this chapter, sixteen of the nineteen participants in my study (16/19) recognized that their perceptions of *who teachers were*—including their motivations, passions, values, and experiences—were central to their assessments of, reactions to, and work with teachers. Moreover, in keeping with a growing inter-disciplinary tradition that recognizes the deep value teachers bring to their work as persons (e.g., Cranton, 2001, 2006; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Drago-Severson, 2012; Greene, 1978; Higgins, 2011; Hansen, 1993, 1995, 2001; Kelchtermans, 2009; Moustakas, 1959, 1966; Palmer, 2007; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994), these participants understood that opportunities to see and know their teachers as real and genuine people served as important supports to their learning—as well as meaningful complements to and augmentations of good teachers’ abilities to *see* students in authentic and caring ways (as described in Chapter 5).

Accordingly, I next describe participants' sharings about the power of seeing teachers':

- Positive motivations (7/19),
- Genuine passion and interest (6/19), and
- Authentic selves (12/19).

Of course, and as a few of these participants noted, there is no one right way to teach with self. Keith, for instance, explained that good teachers "are similar in what they've done to help make their classes work, but different in how they go about it." Nevertheless, in order to highlight common themes and ideas shared by participants about this topic, I offer the following as illustrations of how real teachers were able to share something of their selves for the benefit of participants, openly and compellingly.

In it for the "right" reasons: Teachers' positive motivations. As a number of scholars have argued (e.g., Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamburn, 1992; Wentzel, 1997), how teachers feel about their work—and their motivations—matters in the classroom. For seven of the nineteen participants in my study (7/19), good teachers taught because it was something that they genuinely wanted to do—something that *meant something* to them on a visceral and fundamental level.

Like the six others in this group, for instance, Travis felt that his best teachers "all are teaching because they want to." Offering a specific example about one of his favorite teachers from his prior school, Travis explained that this teacher

taught for the sole purpose of the enjoyment of helping students.... [He was] the landlord of seven or eight apartment buildings...so he didn't have to teach for a source of income.... [He] chose to because he wanted to help.

In a similar way, Gina recognized that good teachers are often motivated *intrinsically*, and find real value in the work beyond the exchange of goods and services. As she explained:

I feel like a teacher needs to find working with kids rewarding to be a good teacher... [They have to] want more out of it than just going there [to school], teaching the curriculum, and then coming home. I feel like a teacher has to want more in order to be a good teacher.

Indeed, this willingness to do more and go beyond, was, from these seven participants' perspectives, a large part of what good teachers had "to offer to students," as Olive phrased it—and it was also a key way that teachers signaled and verified their positive motivations to students. More specifically, good teachers' willingness to show up for students in ways that surpassed basic job requirements helped participants understand that these teachers truly meant it when they said they cared about them and teaching.

Offering a more specific example, for instance, one participant (pseudonym masked for confidentiality) appreciated the authentic support one of her teachers demonstrated during a time of great personal loss. As she explained of this teacher, "When my dad died freshman year, he came to his wake and talked to my mom and everything." Another participant (pseudonym also masked for confidentiality) explained how much it meant to him when one of his former teachers agreed to tutor him at home during a prolonged illness. As he explained, "I had to miss school for months, and [the school]...offered me tutors." However, even though administrators "asked every teacher if they would do the tutoring themselves," only one teacher agreed. Not only did this one teacher's willingness to help *stand out* in important ways for this participant, but it also accorded with his understanding of what a good teacher should *want to do*. As he explained, "it seems to me that [good teachers] want to help me, as best as possible, in any situation."

While these participants' descriptions emphasize, on the one hand, teachers' extensive commitments to helping students both in and out of school, they also imply, on the other, that good teachers found some satisfaction and fulfillment in the act of making a difference. As Hansen (1995) similarly explained of teachers who are "called" to the classroom, service to

others “does not imply a one-way subordination of the person to the practice. Vocation describes work that is fulfilling and meaningful to the individual, such that it helps provide a sense of self, or personal identity” (p. 3). Indeed, for these participants, good teachers helped—not in spite of themselves or because they were required to—but as an expression of who they were as people.

Evincing passion and interest. In addition to being in it “for the right reasons,” good teachers, according to seven of the nineteen student participants in my study (7/19), taught in ways that demonstrated—and modeled—genuine passion and interest. In keeping with a growing body of literature that celebrates teachers’ authentic engagement with their work and their craft (e.g., Ayers, 2001; hooks, 1994; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010), these seven participants felt, like Gina, that teachers “really need to have a passion for something to be able to get up and talk about it and teach it.” Charlie, too, agreed that “somebody who is passionate is usually better suited to show other people why they can be passionate [too].” As Charlotte similarly explained of her best teachers:

The [alternative school] teachers are really interested in what they do. It means a lot to them. Like, they put time into it and are really proud of the classes that they come up with and are really excited to teach the information. All of the teachers that I’ve had that I ever liked really like what they do. I think that’s important. Because when teachers don’t want to or don’t like what they are doing, there’s not as much enthusiasm and it doesn’t come across as something that’s interesting. But when a teacher is really invested in what they’re teaching, you can tell and it makes it more fun.

Like Charlotte, Keith recognized the importance of teaching from a place of genuine interest and *self*. Offering teachers his best advice, for instance, he explained, “You can’t have the material hold you back from putting yourself into it. You can’t be afraid...to involve yourself with the information to get students to grab onto it more.” Reflecting, too, on what made his alternative school teachers so effective, he explained, “There are just so many different things that all these teachers offer because those [classes] are their passions. That’s what they

love doing.” Indeed, by modeling genuine interest in their subject matter—and for learning itself—good teachers were often able to inspire a parallel curiosity in students, these seven participants shared.

A “natural,” authentic self. Perhaps most directly indicative of the deep value participants placed on a teacher’s authentic self was their emphasis on teachers’ “natural” ways of helping, teaching, and being. Indeed, twelve of the nineteen participants (12/19) spontaneously explained during interviews that good teaching came from someplace within a teacher him- or herself—from something intrinsic to that teacher as a person. For instance, when I asked participants about what made a particular teacher or group of teachers “good,” they overwhelmingly explained that it had something to do with *who that teacher was*. Paco, for instance, explained of one teacher, “It’s just the way that she is. It’s definitely the way that she is.” Harlan, too, answered, “I think he’s just like that.” Jack similarly explained, “It’s just the way that they are.” And Gina likewise responded, “It was just him as a person.” Moreover, when I asked participants about this idea during focus groups (in order to member check my preliminary findings, I asked if they felt that it was “an important thing for a teacher to be ‘who they are’”), I was answered by a chorus of yeses every time. One student even added, comically but earnestly, “let the record show that I nodded vigorously.”

Summing up the beauty—and diversity—of teachers who bring themselves to their work in this way, Keith explained that his alternative school teachers “teach the class as who they are.” As he further explained, their ability to do this “creates a dynamic with all these different teachers that makes you love them in different ways.” Related to these participants’ ideas about a teacher’s authentic self or personality, they explained that good teachers were able to manifest *who they were* in practice in a number of important ways, including:

- Developing a personal teaching style (6/19),
- Revealing themselves as “real” people (9/19), and
- Inspiring students’ natural respect (5/19).

I discuss each of these below.

Developing a personal teaching style. Scholars have recognized that students often appreciate teachers who teach creatively or beyond the textbook (e.g., Noddings, 1988; Wilson & Corbett, 2001). Others, too, have acknowledged that building a personal style is a key to teachers’ professional growth (e.g., Kelchtermans, 2009; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Similarly, six of the nineteen participants in my study (6/19) argued that a teacher’s unique and individual style in the classroom was another important indicator of authentic practice.

Capturing this idea, for instance, Travis explained that the best teachers, from his perspective, put their “own personal spin on things.” Keith, too, explained that good teachers are “motivators in their own way. They all have their own ways of doing it...[because] the style just comes from them.” Mark similarly appreciated that his teachers didn’t “always do things by the book,” and noted the connection between teaching style and identity. As he explained, “Each teacher teaches differently...but I guess it just has to do with what kind of person [they] are.”

With even greater gusto, Jack described three of his favorite teachers’ unique (and different) teaching styles as a kind of resistance against the status quo—as an expression of these teachers’ selves in opposition to dominant constructions of and expectations for their work. As he explained:

The three of them are pretty great teachers, and they are completely different. I bet if they were told by their professors when they were trying to become teachers to be just like everybody else, they would just laugh at them. They’d be like, ‘We don’t need your damn rules.’ They were becoming great teachers, but they don’t need to seem like everybody else.

Like Palmer (2007), Jack and the five other participants who emphasized the importance of a teacher's personal style intuitively recognized that "methodological reductionism" fails to respect the diversity of selves, interests, and styles that teachers bring to their work (p. 12). Moreover, they felt, teachers' freedom and courage to teach in ways that communicated who they were and what they cared about ultimately served as an important model for students, who themselves were learning to accept and express themselves as unique and valuable individuals.

Teachers as "real" people. In addition to developing a personal teaching style, nine of the nineteen student participants (9/19) described how impactful it could be when teachers revealed themselves as "real" people in their work and teaching. Like others who have argued that teachers who share something of themselves beyond curricular expertise—like stories, interests, and even frustrations—can be a powerful support to students and their learning (e.g., Adams, 2010; Antrop-Gonzalez, 2006; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Rodriguez, 2008), these participants valued when teachers had both "a personal side and a business side," as Bob framed it. In other words, these participants appreciated when teachers brought at least some of who they were outside of the classroom into their work, lessons, and interactions with students—making it easier for students to realize that teachers did not simply "live in school."

Olive, for instance, stressed how uncomfortable it typically made her to bump into teachers outside of school. "Do you know how awkward it is to see a teacher...in public?" she asked. Yet, as Bob explained, it didn't *have* to be this way. Speaking rhetorically to a hypothetical teacher he asked:

Why would you be one person out of school and another person in school? If you bring the person you are out of school, then you'll just be yourself—and you'll have fun. Because if you come in and you're just completely strict, how far are you gonna get?

For the nine participants who felt this way, a teacher's "realness" translated into a willingness to "let their personalities shine though," as Gina put it—vulnerabilities, foibles, and all. "You get to know them and their quirks," Gina shared happily of her alternative school teachers—and this idea was echoed by Harlan, who similarly acknowledged that his teachers have "their errors and flaws or whatever." In no way a chink in their proverbial armor, teachers' "quirks" and "flaws" were things that made them human for participants, things that made them knowable and relatable in comforting and comfortable ways. As Harlan continued, "I love all of the teachers [at the alternative school]. I may say I don't like them sometimes...but in the end I'm glad they're teaching....Everybody has flaws."

As Rogers and Freiberg (1994) argued, importing a lesson from psychotherapeutic relationships to teaching, *realness* or *genuineness* is an important attitudinal characteristic of any true facilitator of learning. As they explained, "When a facilitator is a real person, being what she is, entering into a relationship with the learner without presenting a front or façade, she is much more likely to be effective" (p. 154). The sharings of these nine participants certainly supported this assertion.

A natural respect. Indicative of how effective teaching with self can be, five of the nineteen participants (5/19) felt that the respect most students afforded good teachers stemmed from the "natural" authority they earned, simply, through their abilities to be themselves so convincingly.

As Mark representatively explained, his best teachers' personalities "kinda shined down" onto students like a warm light, and were evident both in the teachers' actions and in students' responses. "The kids are always interested in what [these teachers] have to say," he explained. "I don't know any students who are not paying attention when they're talking." Palmer (2007)

made a similar point when he argued that “[a]uthority is granted to people who are perceived as authoring their own words, their own actions, their own lives, rather than playing a scripted role at great remove from their own hearts” (p. 34). Perhaps Jack summed it up best when he offered the following about the connection between good teachers’ selfhood and respect:

It would feel like they weren’t *trying* to be a great teacher [emphasis his]. It was just a natural flow thing.... We just kind of had a natural respect for them, without really having fear for them.... It’s just the way the person is. You just have respect for the teacher.

As simple as this sounds, many participants (11/19) recognized that significant obstacles often stood in the way of teaching with self for many educators. I discuss these challenges in the section that follows.

Obstacles to Teaching With Self: Participants’ Reflections

As clearly as participants described their best teachers—and, particularly, the selves they brought to this work—many (11/19) also agreed that good teaching was “probably not an easy thing,” as Keith explained. While these participants named a number of external constraints that could limit teaching with self—such as the large size and bureaucracy of most schools (7/19) and the pressures of many professional expectations (8/19)—a few participants (4/19) also pointed to the *internal* challenges that might negatively influence a teacher’s work. I discuss these briefly at the end of this section in relation to teachers’ developmental capacities—or the qualitatively different ways that teachers (like all adults) make sense of their work and lives (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000). Making a similar point that teaching—like life—is an ongoing and evolving process, Hansen (2001) explained that some teachers’ limited expression of personhood in their practice does not warrant

the drastic conclusion that weaker, less effective, and less memorable teachers are not persons. Rather, it may suggest that such teachers have not occupied the role as fully as others whom we regard as more successful. It may mean that such teachers are not yet the persons they are capable of becoming, at least within the terms of the role. (p. 24)

With this compassionate understanding as backdrop, I next offer a snapshot of the challenges to teaching with self that participants in my study named as most pressing.

Teaching in Large, Bureaucratic School Systems

Just as many participants felt constrained and overwhelmed by the large size of their former schools (as described in Chapter 4), a number of participants (7/19) felt that *teachers* could also be restricted by such contexts. Neil suspected, for instance, that many teachers wanted to do more, but were limited by the hectic pace of the school day and hierarchical control of their work. As he explained, speaking of teachers who weren't able to "show up" in some of the authentic ways described above, "I feel like they're all victims trapped by their, you know, level system, and their environment. Just like the scheduling and everything." Keith, too, realized that the size and pace of larger, traditional schools made it harder for teachers to teach authentically:

Other teachers in other schools [not alternative schools] don't have the time to do that. It's a much larger school. They don't have the ability to create the lessons they want to, because they are just swamped having to teach all these kids so fast. They don't have time to explore it [the curriculum] they way they want to.... They aren't given the time to say, 'How do I want to do this? Is there another neat way to get this information to the students?' They just don't have time for that because they have classes period after period after period.

In addition, both Neil and Keith described how hierarchical, bureaucratic oversight could dampen teaching in larger school systems. As Keith explained, teachers are often "given the way they have [teach]. They're given the structure of their class"—which restricts, in some cases, the creativity and self they can bring to their teaching. Neil even perceived a degree of

distrust in the external control of teachers' work, which sometimes kept teachers from "stepping forward" genuinely as people. As he explained, control over teachers "is kinda like a leash, I guess." Still, he wondered, "They have enough control to walk themselves—so why the leash?"

In a parallel discussion, MacDonald and Shirley (2009) described the dangers of what they called "alienated teaching," or teaching that demands compliance to external conditions beyond teachers' control—conditions that may even "undermine their own moral purpose and sense of efficacy" (pp. 2-3). As I will share next, participants recognized that professional expectations that idealize emotional distance in schools and quantitative measures of success can cause similar problems—for both students and teachers.

Managing Contrary Professional Expectations

Eight of the nineteen participants in my study (8/19) felt that pervasive understandings of teachers as "objective" professionals whose main job is to support student achievement (as measured by standardized tests) severely limited many teachers' opportunities to teach authentically with self. As Rogers and Freiberg (1994) explained, a teacher is often "conditioned to think of herself as the expert, the information giver, the keeper of order, the evaluator of products, the examination giver, the one who, at the end, formulates that goal of all 'education, the grade'" (p. 41). Even when, as Neil explained, some of his former teachers wanted to connect more genuinely with students, they seemed to be "taken back a bit" by the need to "stay professional" (as more traditionally understood). Mark similarly agreed that "it's hard sometimes for teachers to get off that little switch" that makes them feel like they need to control things—and Gina also recognized that most teachers were "scared of unprofessionalism."

Related to this, these eight participants felt that mounting accountability demands put teachers even deeper "under pressure" (as Frederick noted). Again, just as many participants

themselves felt overtaxed and anxious about high-stakes testing in their prior school settings (as I described in Chapter 4), they intuited, as well, that many teachers “probably don’t like it either.” Charlotte, in particular, was very sympathetic to teachers in this way. As she explained, “I think that [testing] just creates a bad teaching situation when teachers are forced to teach material for the test and that’s what reflects on them. You can’t teach well that way, in my opinion.”

Linking this sentiment more directly to the idea of teaching with self, she continued:

Having such strict guidelines doesn’t give the teacher a lot of room to be the good teachers that they can be, because they have to do the same things everyone else is teaching. They [can’t]...make it interesting and unique in their own way, really. So it’s hard. You want to be a good teacher, but you don’t have the time or ability without it reflecting badly on your test scores.... It’s hard to find a balance, I think, from the teacher’s perspective, in that sort of situation.

Echoing research that suggests that many teachers are indeed becoming frustrated with mounting testing and accountability demands (e.g., Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Santoro, 2011; Schniedwind & Sapon-Shevin, 2012), these participants realized that external assessments of teaching sometimes limit the ways teachers can bring *self* into their work.

Teachers’ Differing Capacities for Authenticity

In addition to the challenges described above, a few participants (4/19) also recognized that teachers may not yet have the internal capacities needed to express themselves authentically in the classroom. Although participants did not explicitly frame it in this way, their reflections suggest that teachers need certain *developmental capacities* in order to teach with self in any context (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000)—capacities which Drago-Severson (2009) defined as “the cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and intrapersonal capacities that enable us to manage better the demands of leadership, teaching, learning, and life” (p. 8). While I will offer a fuller discussion of the developmental implications of my research as well as strategies for supporting

teachers' growth and development in Chapter 8, I want to point out, here, that participants *noticed* when teachers had difficulty taking students' perspectives, regulating their own emotions, or making themselves vulnerable—skills tied intimately with one's developmental capacities (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012).

Olive, for instance, felt that some teachers just could not see things from her point of view. As she shared:

Maybe for some teachers it's just how they grew up. Like, they never really struggled that much...[so] maybe they can't relate to the problems I'm having. They can't really see things from my perspective. So, they just completely ignore the fact that I'm struggling. They just brush it off.

Additionally, Frederick felt that some teachers were unable to hold or channel their frustrations in productive ways. Thinking of teachers who frequently had a “bad day” and “took it out on others,” for instance, he ardently argued that a teacher's bad day shouldn't have to translate into bad days for everyone else. Moreover, Harlan explained that many teachers' inauthentic behaviors stemmed, from his perspective, from their fears that “their students don't [really] care for them”—a painful concern shared by many adults who are run, in a developmental sense, by their need for the approval and acceptance of valued others (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012).

While I will discuss teachers' different developmental orientations in greater detail in Chapter 8, it seems clear, from this perspective, that the ways teachers make sense of their relationships, their emotions, and others' experiences *matter* to students—and that they can also play a crucial role in teachers' varying abilities to show up authentically. Still, as Rogers and Freiberg (1994) acknowledged, it can feel frightening and risky for *any* teacher to let students know him or her as a person, because, in the end, showing oneself to students is really about relinquishing the comfort of the mask. It involves, fundamentally, revealing oneself and one's vulnerabilities—and this may be the hardest thing of all to do.

Pedagogical Connections

In this section, I offer six pedagogical takeaways suggested by participants' insights about teaching with self. Just as in Chapter 5, I offer these suggestions not as a comprehensive guide, but rather as an opportunity to consider how participants' ideas can add to and extend understandings of authentic practice—especially in service to a diverse group of students who had previously struggled in school. Moreover, while participants most frequently described teaching with self in relation to their alternative school teachers, a few, like Keith, pointed out that “there are some teachers that can do it” in traditional high schools as well. Accordingly, I offer these strategies also as ideas for future inquiry into teaching with self beyond the alternative school context.

Strategy 1: Remember and Reflect on Your Motivations

A number of scholars have recognized that a critical awareness of *self* as a teacher—and a reflective stance in relation to the values, priorities, and motivations one brings to teaching—are of vital importance to any meaningful, thoughtful, and effective pedagogical act (e.g., Drago-Severson, 2012; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Hansen, 1995; Palmer, 2007; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). For the participants in this research, a teacher's motivations indeed made a palpable difference, and participants encouraged teachers to remain connected to the positive hopes and goals they brought to the work. As Olive put it, “You should always remember why you wanted to be a teacher in the first place. Be a teacher for the right reasons, and don't forget those reasons.” Mark took a similarly long view of good teaching and argued that teachers should teach in ways that keep them connected to their core values over time. “You don't want,” he explained, to look back on your career and ask, “Who is that person?” Rather, he advised, you should teach “as somebody that you'll be happy with being for the rest of your life.” As these

participants' examples suggest, remaining mindful of and teaching in accordance with one's motivations and values are powerful ways to bring—and keep—one's self in the classroom.

Strategy 2: Mean It

Participants also suggested that teachers need to align what they say and believe with what they do. In other words, they need to *really mean it* when they offer to help or care for students. As Mark advised teachers, “You’ve gotta do something else other than [say], ‘Come after school if you want help.’ Because when you say to these kids, ‘Do you want help?’ they’re just afraid to ask for it or they’re afraid to show it.” Remembering how painful more hollow shows of teacher support had felt, for instance, Paco shared the following:

At [my former] school they would just be like, ‘Oh, how’s your day?’ Like, no. Do you really want to know, or are you just saying that? Or, [even worse,] maybe I’m gonna tell you and you’re not going to listen or even care.

Ultimately, as Paco understood (and as others, too, have argued [e.g., Berlant, 2004; Whitebrook, 2002]), aligning words and actions is one important way that teachers—and all people—can earn and maintain others’ trust, and show that they *are who they claim to be*. Capturing the essence of this suggestion, Brian offered the following simple advice to anyone hoping to teach effectively, “Always make sure that your students can trust you.”

Strategy 3: Share Your Self and Your Passions

The participants that I learned from also felt that it was important for teachers to share something of themselves with students—both academically and personally. In addition to appreciating teachers’ genuine passion for their subject matter, for instance, some participants enjoyed learning about relevant aspects of teachers’ lives and/or extra-curricular interests. Others, like Jack, also appreciated chances to engage with teachers *out of role*. Sharing one such

example, Jack described how enjoyable it was to play a video game with a teacher during a holiday party at his alternative school:

So, we were all playing [video games during the party]. My math teacher walked...in the room and said, 'I get up next.' I was, like, facing off against him. Wow, that's pretty awesome. It was like I had another friend next to me. I think I said, 'If I beat you then I won't have to do homework for, like, the next week. If you beat me I have to do an extra test or something.' Then the meal started and we never got to finish the game, but that was a really cool thing. It didn't feel like, 'Oh, crap, now I've got to put up with [my teacher].' It was like, 'Okay, old man, let's go.'

While perhaps not a “passion” for this teacher (although I could be wrong on this one), playing the X-Box game allowed Jack to see him more *as a person*. While surprising at first, their relaxed, genuine connection ultimately deepened Jack's respect for the teacher, and expanded their relationship both personally and professionally. Indeed, as others have noted, being accessible to students both personally and academically can be a powerful support to learning (e.g., Goddard, 2003; Hattie, 2009).

Strategy 4: Be Willing to Laugh

Related to the idea of teachers lowering their guard or stepping—at least temporarily—out of role, participants frequently (7/19) mentioned the importance of teachers maintaining and demonstrating a sense of humor. Recognizing that school and teaching—like life—can sometimes be absurd, participants genuinely appreciated when teachers could laugh *with them* at the occasional goofiness, blunders, and missteps of being together in the classroom. Sharing an example of how a school-based adult's laughter can quickly transform a student's perceptions, one participant (pseudonym masked for confidentiality) told me the story of a time he jokingly hung his coat on a coat hook—while he was still wearing it. As he shared:

I was kind of, like, hanging there, and [the school secretary] walked past and looked and started laughing. And I always thought she was the most serious person here. Well, she is, but [it turns out] she's still playful, I guess.

Contrary to the common teaching advice not to smile until Christmas, laughter was, for these participants, an important way that teachers (and other school-based adults) came across as more than empty personifications of their roles.

Strategy 5: Be Flexible

In Chapter 5, I discussed participants' appreciation of curricular flexibility as a strategy for *seeing* students, and this idea applies as well to manifestations of teachers' power and authority. As described above, teachers who rigidly and dogmatically upheld even the smallest rules typically felt less authentic—less *real*—to participants. On the other hand, participants genuinely appreciated teachers who seemed able to take broader perspectives on the rules. These teachers offered guidance, structure, and discipline—but in ways that felt more thoughtful and humane. As Neil shared, “there are certain situations where rules...get tossed out the window.... Like, people—*humans*—should care [emphasis his].” Charlie, too, appreciated teachers who occasionally offered students a reprieve from “all those strict sets of rules.” When teachers were not run by rules, he explained, it made the classroom “a more comfortable environment” with “a bit more room to breathe.”

Strategy 6: Acknowledge Challenges and Limitations

Related to this, participants understood that there were many things beyond teachers' control in schools—and that even the best teachers made mistakes. Still, participants appreciated when teachers could simply and genuinely *acknowledge* teaching's inevitable challenges and limitations—and offer an apology or explanation when merited. As Charlotte said of the many curricular restraints teachers now face:

If you know that people aren't enjoying what you're teaching and you have to teach it anyway, it probably is a good idea if you sympathize with you class, or

empathize. ‘I’m sorry’ is the word here. Make sure they understand that you understand that they don’t like it and you want to make it more interesting.

Charlie similarly explained that even “dumb” rules felt less oppressive when good teachers simply acknowledged that they were obliged to uphold them. As he shared, “There are really dumb rules, but around good company, they really didn’t matter as much because everyone knew they were...pointless.” Finally, Olive felt that teachers would do well to admit to students when they’d made a mistake, or when they’d allowed their emotions to get the best of them. When I asked her how teachers could do this, she suggested, “[By] getting us [students] to understand that you’re just not having a good day.” Powerfully, she continued, “I feel like the kids would understand.” From what Olive and other participants shared with me, it indeed seems that they would—and that they’d want to.

Chapter Summary & Closing Reflection

Honesty and transparency make you vulnerable.
Be honest and transparent anyway.
– Mother Theresa

In this chapter, I highlighted participants’ emphases on selfhood and authenticity in teachers’ practice—or the importance of what I call *teaching with self*. In addition to feeling seen by teachers (as described in Chapter 5), most of the participants in this study (16/19) named opportunities to genuinely *see and know their teachers as people* as critical and complementary supports to their learning. Aligning with long-cherished, human-centered ideals of teaching (e.g., Greene, 1978; Hansen, 1993, 1995, 2001; Jackson, 1986; Moustakas, 1959, 1966), and standing also in sharp contrast to pervasive, gendered constructions of teaching as *selfless* work (Apple, 1983, 1985; Au, 2007; Higgins, 2003, 2011), these participants’ insights helped to raise up—from the student perspective—the importance of a wholly present, knowable, *invested* adult as a classroom leader, model, and facilitator of learning. They also, as I shared, helped to

augment and extend Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) model of authentic teaching to the alternative school context.

Indeed, throughout this chapter I offered participants' reflections about how the self of a teacher—including his or her motivations, passions, values, and experiences—dramatically influenced participants' assessments of, reactions to, and feelings about that teacher. To begin this discussion, I first offered participants' ideas about how a teacher's unsuitable, externally-driven, or hidden self could distort practice and limit effectiveness. I then offered a detailed analysis of the positive and meaningful ways participants felt good teachers taught with self—or brought themselves to their work and the classroom by demonstrating positive motivations, genuine interest, and/or their authentic selves. I ended the chapter with a description of the structural, cultural, and bureaucratic obstacles that a number of participants named as significant challenges to authentic teaching, as well as a series of takeaways for practice.

Closing Reflection

While, in the next chapter, I will shift my analytic focus to participants' sharings about student and teacher selves *in relationship*, I would first like to offer here—as a caveat to all I've shared above—that these participants' appreciations for authentic teachers were not disguised pleas for academic relativism or slackened expectations. In other words, they were not asking for an abandonment of rules, a thoughtless blurting out of teachers' "real" feelings or personal secrets, a hodgepodge curriculum, or an easy ride. Nor were they suggesting that a teacher's "good" personality should supersede the importance of content mastery and pedagogical skill. As Frederick explained, for instance, "A teacher's still a person. I could like them as a person, but they might not be a good teacher." Travis, too, explained that his reason for switching to the alternative school—and his deep respect for his teachers there—actually stemmed from the great

weight and importance he placed on learning. As he shared, “I wanted to have to actually work and to have a high school career that I would be proud of, and know that I was getting something out of it.”

I offer this here because, when sharing ideas about teacher authenticity with others, I occasionally encounter worries about the limits and nature of human selfhood, and its role in education. Can we, for instance, *trust* teachers to act as autonomous selves in the classroom? Do teachers have to share *everything* about their lives with students in order to be truly authentic? And what happens to standards if teachers only teach what they are passionate about? In keeping, perhaps, with Taylor’s (1991) assertion that authenticity has meaning only when explored against “horizons of significance” (p. 39)—or in relation to a wider spectrum of moral, political, and social concerns—these participants’ sharings suggest a powerful *ideal* for teaching that takes into account larger forces, imperatives, and perspectives, but nonetheless maintains space for and holds sacred individual teachers’ deepest expressions of self in practice. As Hansen (2001) similarly explained of the teacher as a moral person, teachers “can guide their work not according to popular fashions or their own whims, but by a thoughtful, broad, dynamic image of a growing, educated person” (p. 57).

Ultimately, from my perspective, the participants in my study were indeed looking for such thoughtful, open teachers. They were looking for teachers who could model the power and beauty of living and growing authentically as oneself, and who—with their caring and genuine influence—could also be of good company and support to students as they were growing and developing too. Mark, for instance, revisited his prior comparison of authoritarian teachers to string-pulling “Geppettos” (which I shared earlier in this chapter) in order to better capture the essence of a *good* teacher’s guidance:

I look at it [what good teachers do] as the *actual* story of Pinocchio [emphasis his], where the puppet comes alive. So, you know, [teachers] kind of lead us on our way, pulling those strings, but actually, we kind of find our way ourselves when we come alive.... [T]hanks to Geppetto, we have times we can finally start building our own paths to what we want in life. Thanks to them [the teachers] and the pointers we've received and things of that nature.

As I will describe next in Chapter 7, this promising intersection of student and teacher selves—and the unique and powerful bonds such connections can foster—were similarly central to participants' descriptions of good teachers.

Chapter VII

AUTHENTIC SELVES IN RELATIONSHIP: STUDENT-TEACHER CONNECTIONS AND A FOCUS ON COMMUNITY

In this chapter, I focus on participants' descriptions of their relationships with good teachers—as well as the ways that they felt their authentic connections with teachers and others throughout their alternative school communities were important supports for their learning and success. Perhaps not surprisingly, given what we know about the value of in-school relationships for students at-risk of educational failure (e.g., Croninger & Lee, 2001; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), *all* of the participants in my research (19/19) voiced a strong appreciation for relationships—in one way or another. While I discuss a variety of relationships throughout this chapter, I begin by focusing on participants' descriptions of *student-teacher relationships* (14/19)—and the ways participants felt that good teachers (a) fostered genuine connections with students (10/19) and (b) maintained natural boundaries (7/19) in support to these relationships. In other words, I share participants' descriptions of the ways good teachers were able to initiate positive relationships with students and also maintain them over time by navigating and honoring the hard-to-define but important line between students and teachers. By offering a nuanced description of what meaningful student-teacher relationships looked and felt like for participants, this chapter begins to paint an even clearer picture of these very important connections—which participants characterized as both similar to and distinct from other kinds of close and caring relationships (e.g., with friends or family).

Next in this chapter, I describe participants' complementary experiences with *other* kinds of school-based relationships—a focus that extends Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) authentic teaching framework in meaningful ways. Fifteen of the nineteen participants (15/19), for

instance, emphasized the importance of *peer-to-peer relationships* in their learning, and five participants (5/19) explicitly linked good teachers' interpersonal modeling to improvements in their own relationships with classmates and peers. Moreover, a few participants (3/19) recognized that regular staff collaborations (e.g., frequent opportunities for teachers to collaborate and connect) were a boon for *all* in a school community. Ultimately, though, the importance of a larger network of genuine connections—between many students and different teachers—emerged as key support for many participants (10/19).

In light of participants' insights about the ways good teachers facilitated meaningful relationships *throughout* a school community, I offer, toward the end of this chapter, a revisualization of the authentic teaching model that recognizes the role good teachers play in nurturing and sustaining multiple, multifaceted interactions over time. As in Chapters 5 and 6, I conclude with a brief summary of pedagogical takeaways informed by participants' examples.

Student-Teacher Relationships: The Meeting of Authentic Selves

As I shared in Chapter 2, teaching is generally understood as a *relational* enterprise (Betck, 1992; Chaskin & Rauner, 1995, as cited by Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Mayeroff, 1990; Noddings, 1984, 2005). Positive student-teacher relationships, for example, have been linked with students' higher social functioning, improved engagement and behavior, and positive academic identities (e.g., Aness, 2003; Anderman & Kaplan, 2008; Hallinan, 2008; Hughes, Cavell, & Jackson, 1999; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Lewis, Ream, Bocian, Fast, Cardullo, & Hammond, 2012; Noam, & Fiore, 2004)—and meta-analytic and longitudinal research have likewise found correlations between positive student-teacher relationships and students' improved academic outcomes (Hattie, 2009; Hughes, Luo, Kwok, & Loyd, 2008; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Moreover, research suggests that these relationships take on *even*

greater significance when teachers work with struggling or disaffected learners (e.g., Croninger & Lee, 2001; Hamre, Pianta, & Allen, 2012; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Muller, 2001; Woolley & Bowen, 2007).

In keeping with these findings, all nineteen student participants in my study (19/19) acknowledged the importance of relationships to their learning and school experiences—and fourteen of the nineteen (14/19) specifically named strong student-teacher relationships as a *critical* part of their work with good teachers. As one participant (pseudonym masked for confidentiality) shared during a focus group, eliciting nods from others in the room, “It’s all about relationships with your teacher.” Accordingly, in this section, I present participants’ insights and observations about student-teacher relationships, particularly within the alternative school context. I represent an idealized version of this relationship in Figure 9, below, as the meeting of student and teacher selves.

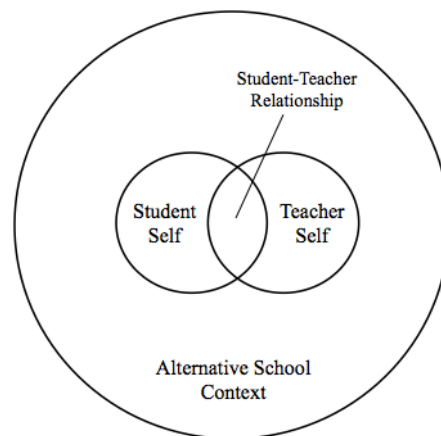


Figure 9: The student-teacher relationship in an alternative school context

As Figure 9 displays, this visualization mirrors Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004) original model, which I shared in Chapters 2 and 5. However, my intention here and throughout this

chapter is to infuse this representation with participants' insights about selfhood and relationships. Unlike traditional Venn diagrams, for instance, which imply a finite logic of *yes* or *no*, *either* or *both*, Figure 9 is really about the complex balance of authentic selves in relationship. The evenly overlapping circles, for example, suggest an equitable focus on *both* student and teacher identities (as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively)—as well as the commonalities and differences all teachers and students bring to their relationships. Representing aspects of the self—from both directions—that are seen and/or shared (i.e., in the center of the diagram), as well as parts that are divergent and/or less-visible (i.e., outside of the overlap), the meeting of these two circles as I present them here is really about a synergistic, reciprocal coalescing of selves. It is, in other words, a celebration of the shared understandings and experiences that students and teachers can build together in their work when they meet each other as living, growing, diverse, and authentic human beings.

Capturing some of this nuance—as well as the essence of what he and thirteen other participants felt about student-teacher relationships—Keith offered the following advice to teachers everywhere: “Know your students, and let them know you, too. After you get past that first barrier [of not knowing each other], which separates so many kids from their classrooms every day,...you can just do so many things.” Toward this hopeful end, I present in this section participants' reflections about their relationships with teachers, including:

- Their appreciations for good teachers' abilities to initiate relationships with students (10/19),
- The “natural” but essential boundaries good teachers maintain with students (7/19), and
- The “unique” position teachers hold in students' lives (19/19).

Inarguably, all that I have shared in prior chapters—about teachers seeing students, and also about teachers revealing themselves as real-life, flesh-and-blood people—can be understood and reframed as expressions of positive student-teacher relationships. Nevertheless, I focus here on participants’ *additional* insights about these important connections in order to paint an even clearer picture of student-teacher relationships in practice. Moreover, just as in previous chapters, all code counts represent the number of students who spontaneously named an idea or theme during my research, and do not necessarily imply the *disagreement* of other participants. When applicable, I will account for discrepant data directly.

An Ability to Connect: Inviting Students Into Positive Relationships

Interestingly, ten of the nineteen participants in my study (10/19) intuitively described strong student-teacher relationships as something good teachers had a particular *ability*—and responsibility—to foster.

Looking back on all of his teachers, for instance, Damon captured this shared sentiment by explaining that his best teachers possessed a distinct “ability to connect.” Damon’s language—which positioned a teacher’s capacity for fostering relationships as an *ability*—was echoed by a number of participants. Matt, for instance, described a good teacher as “someone *who can connect with you* [emphasis added],” and Travis similarly recognized that the most effective teachers, from his perspective, “are *able* to build strong relationships [emphasis added].” As he continued, “they can do that while still teaching us the things we need to know to have a better future.”

While I discuss the developmental implications of relationship-building as a capacity in Chapter 8, I want to acknowledge here that these ten participants’ reflections implied a *directionality* to student-teacher relationships that placed much of the initial responsibility for

connection on teachers. In other words, these participants appreciated teachers' ability to reach out *first* to students—and to accordingly assume some of the risk involved in inviting another person into relationship. As Bob offered to teachers, highlighting this idea:

I just feel like, alright, since you're the older person—cool. Show me you care, and I'll show you I care. And maybe at the end of the school year, you'll be like 'I care, you care, and we all care together.' You know?... It's like Karma. You do good for somebody, and somebody'll do good for you.

Keith similarly agreed that good teachers need to *model* authentic engagement and connection as a support to students and budding relationships. As he put it, "If the class is a pool and you're the teacher, you have to stick your head out of the water so the kids will wanna jump in too."

Offering a specific example of a time a teacher did this, one student (pseudonym masked for confidentiality) described an experience he had with his English teacher, who connected with him about his love of filmmaking:

So, [my teacher] somehow found out [about my experience making short films] and she approached me [about showing one to her]. I didn't know her, but she seemed trustworthy because she's just really—I don't know, she seemed very approachable. And so she approached me and asked [to see one].... That moment was an ice-breaker, with [my teacher] and I. I didn't know her at all and she didn't know me. Usually it would take time...to get to know someone, [but her invitation skipped us]...straight to the easy path.

Still, as this participant recognized, even with the support of good and "approachable" teachers, reciprocating in student-teacher relationships—or showing oneself in return after a teacher's initial invitation—is a fragile act of trust. As he admitted of this particular experience, "When I was showing [the teacher] the video I was shaking in my boots."

Similarly, Neil recalled how nervous and excited he felt to loan one of his teachers a book for the first time, even though he had come to like this teacher greatly and thought the book would really interest him. As he explained, "I never did that before. I never gave a teacher, like, that kind of gesture."

Providing students with a relatable opening or “starting point” (as Neil described it), was one way that these ten participants felt that *good teachers* opened students to the possibilities of stronger, supportive, and more genuine relationships with teachers. As they shared, however, bridging the gulf between student and teacher selves takes more than just caring or noticing. It takes, from their sense making, a teacher’s sensitivity, deliberate effort, patience, and willingness to step forward with an extended hand.

A Relational Balance: Recognizing Boundaries

Just as good teachers were able to initiate meaningful relationships with students, they were also able—as a number of participants explained (7/19)—to navigate close interactions with students by maintaining intangible but important boundaries.

As I shared in Chapter 6, participants did not want their teachers to act like peers, nor were they looking for adults who catered to their every whim. Rather, their desire for the caring and genuine influence of good teachers carried over into their respect for “the line” good teachers were able to draw—a line that, as Damon put it, “keeps control of the classroom while keeping it...with a certain amount of fun.” Indeed, for the seven participants who emphasized this “line,” good student-teacher relationships were really about maintaining a delicate balance—between students and teachers, requirements and interests, discipline and flexibility, and disclosure and reserve. Echoing ideas from the literature about how student-teacher relationships can be both relational and structured (e.g., Cothran, Kulinna, & Garrahy, 2003; Gregory & Ripski, 2008), these participants argued, like Charlotte, that the best teachers are really “the teachers who are the most balanced.”

Speaking to this point, Charlie explained that the student-teacher relationship is “not really quite an even relationship.” As he continued:

There are some things that a teacher really shouldn't share with a student, but the student could share with the teacher. I've had multiple teachers over the years say 'If you ever need to talk about anything, you can come see me,' and I know they mean it. [I don't usually take] them up on it, but I know that they mean good. These are good teachers [that] I'm talking about, and I could talk to them about basically everything. But you don't want a teacher coming up to you and saying 'I went on a great date last night.'... It's a two-way street, but a good teacher knows the line.

Katy, too, recognized that "you can't really hang out with the teacher outside of school or...be friends with them online, like on Facebook." As she intuitively understood, "That would be kind of weird."

Still, even though Neil agreed that a teacher "can only go so far [in terms of] being friends [with students]," he argued that such boundaries need not impede genuine and meaningful student-teacher connections. Rather, he explained, they are just natural manifestations of the relationship itself—and reflections of the unique role teachers play in students' lives:

You just have to accept the fact that they'll be that teacher, and that's okay. Then you can work with that.... It's like you just work with that. You don't work around it, you don't work against it—you work with it.... You're just comfortable that way.

Even so, Neil explained, the boundaries between students and teachers were not always clearly defined. Rather, they were "something you feel around 'til you get it right," he described. Brian similarly felt that recognizing this line was something that good teachers needed to do intuitively—and for themselves. As he explained, "You don't really have to make sense of it. You just kind of let it flow and it will come." Of course, even though students perceived teachers' successful walking of this line as "natural," the complexity of this task presupposes—as I will discuss further in Chapter 8—teachers' internal capacities to do so comfortably and thoughtfully.

A Most Unique Relationship

Related to this idea of a natural line, all of the student participants I learned from (19/19) helped me to understand that good teachers held a unique position in the pantheon of relationships. Recognizing, for instance, that good teachers were not quite like family but not like friends either, participants used both of these categories as comparisons—but with qualifiers. Paco, for instance, offered the following about one of his teachers, in a way that echoed most participants' ideas:

She was just like family, pretty much. I count her as my family...even though she's not. [She's] like a sister or an aunt. More like an aunt. An aunt in the family that isn't really related to me, but I could still go to her if I needed to.

Neil likewise found it difficult to pin down a characterization of his relationship with good teachers, although his rhetorical back-and-forth nonetheless managed to capture some of his feelings:

They're more like mentors than teachers, I think. Or 'teachers' the way everyone else would [use the word].... I think the difference is, a mentor is more on a personal level than [a] professional level. I think they're more like older siblings in a way, or like uncles and aunts or something like that.... The teachers are just like—I don't know. I don't know what it is, but they are like—amistads [meaning a different kind of friendship].

Keith similarly helped to clarify the distinction, explaining that, for him, the complexity of a student-teacher relationship came largely from “the distance of age”—as well as the nature of a teacher's role. As he described:

You know they are older than you, but you feel safer when you're around them.... They seem to treat you more than just like a kid.... You want to have that person in your life...as a superior or an elder you are able to interact with more as an associate, or a very close friend. In some cases that's what they become.

Ultimately, however, participants seemed to agree with Jeff, who explained that “good teachers are in a category of their own.” After running through a number of comparisons, for

instance, Mark similarly realized, “the only thing they [good teachers] can really remind me of are other teachers in my life.” Charlotte, too, recognized that the relationships she had with teachers were somehow distinct from any other kind: “I don’t think there’s anything like a good teacher, because I think teachers are teachers. They’re like a whole separate group of people. People who are teachers aren’t really like anything else.” While Jeff, Mark, and Charlotte each articulated this distinction independently during their interviews, I found, during focus groups, that participants generally agreed with and enthusiastically embraced this idea of good teachers occupying “their own category.”

Indeed, unlike friends or family members, participants pointed out that teachers enter into relationships with students with the express purpose of, well, *teaching them*. In other words, the student-teacher relationship is itself premised, fundamentally, on the importance of learning—so it makes sense that teachers who are able to initiate and sustain meaningful relationships with students can help them to learn and grow in powerful ways.

As I shared in Chapter 4, seventeen of the nineteen participants in my research (17/19) reported a range of academic improvements that they attributed to their time in alternative schools. For nine participants, however, these gains felt directly linked to their positive relationships with teachers. Representatively, for example, Gina explained that she found it “much easier to learn things and absorb information” when she had a comfortable relationship with her teachers. Travis similarly felt that positive connections with teachers gave him more “self-confidence,” and “enabled [him] to try harder” in class. Bob, on the other hand, realized that *lacking* a trusting relationship with a teacher made it much harder for him to engage academically. As he explained:

If you don’t trust somebody [like a teacher], you really don’t care about that person. And if you don’t care about the person, then you won’t really care about

what they say. So it [his or her teaching] would just go in through the left ear and come right out through the right ear.

Of course, as I will share next, good teachers (according to participants) taught students many things through their relationships—some of which went beyond academics.

Student-to-Student Relationships: Acceptance Made Manifest

Seems I'm not alone at being alone
Hundred billion castaways, looking for a home
– Sting, “Message in a Bottle”

While academic achievement is inarguably important, especially in today's accountability-driven climate, the relationships good teachers fostered with participants—by seeing them, allowing themselves to be seen in return, and nurturing meaningful connections—helped participants to grow in ways outside of good grades and test scores. As I shared briefly in Chapter 4, participants also described meaningful *social* improvements (15/19) that they attributed to their alternative school enrollments. Accordingly, in this section I discuss participants' insights about student-to-student relationships in alternative schools, including their newfound experiences of:

- Feeling accepted, authentically, by peers (13/19), and
- Recognizing and valuing other students (11/19).

Echoing the ideas about seeing and being seen by teachers that I have highlighted in prior chapters, participants' sharings about student-to-student relationships in their alternative schools helped to highlight the *influence* of teacher modeling on participants' social interactions—a connection that a number of participants (5/19) acknowledged directly. Indeed, as I will describe below, good teachers' authentic care for students—and the many ways they demonstrated it—manifested as well in participants' understandings and treatments of other students in their school communities.

Feeling Valued and Accepted by Peers, Authentically

Related to participants' general sense of doing better socially, thirteen participants (13/19) explained that their relationships with peers felt more authentic in their alternative schools, as they were accepted for *who they were*. Just as they valued this kind of seeing and connection with teachers, participants shared that their more genuine friendships meant a great deal to them. As Mark described:

I have a lot of friends here now [at the alternative school]. And they appreciate me for who I am.... And people think to look up to me as much as I need them, you know what I mean?... I really need this, these kids here.

Olive, too, appreciated the overwhelming (and relieving) sense of acceptance she felt at her alternative school:

When you're in a regular high school, [there are] all these cliques and stuff like that. I feel like I just didn't fit into any of them, and it just made me feel really different. [But] when I came here, everybody was exactly how I was. Well, not everybody, but a lot of people were exactly like me, you know? They didn't really fit in at their old school, so then they came here and they fit in here.

As I will describe next in greater detail, participants' feelings of acceptance translated—for many—into more appreciative and authentic recognitions of their alternative school classmates as well.

Seeing and Valuing Other Students

Powerfully, more than half of the participants (11/19) described experiences of seeing and valuing other students more deeply as a result of their time in alternative schools. While, in some cases, this newfound openness to others came as a surprise, these participants proudly—and sometimes adamantly—expressed their appreciation and admiration for fellow alternative school peers. Jack, for example, shared the following:

Back at any [traditional] high school,...you start to realize cliques begin. Like you can't sit at certain cafeteria tables, or you'll get frowned upon. Here, you

can't walk up to any group or person and *not* be accepted [emphasis his].... Back at [the old school], if me and Felix [another student in the program, identity masked] had ever met, we'd probably never [have] spoken. I mean, he was an athletic kid. I was just another gamer kid all the way in the back of the cafeteria sitting by himself. Or Patrick [another student in the program, identity masked], the funny kid. I would never show up with them. Or James [another student in the program, identity masked], the smoker. Never.

Like other participants who felt this way, Jack described the power of seeing classmates *beyond* their social roles and labels, and of recognizing the commonalities they shared despite outward differences. As Neil similarly explained:

[While, at first] it just seemed like they [the other alternative school students] were the kind of kids I wouldn't relate with,...they turned out to be the ones I would relate with the most. It was weird that way.

Matt, too, appreciated the opportunity to see beyond the numerous challenges and personas his classmates brought with them to the classroom. As he put it, “you can fully understand why they are here [in the alternative school] and why you are here—and why you [all] want to be here.”

Perhaps most directly, Mark summed up the shift from social discomfort to camaraderie that these eleven participants described as an important part of their alternative school experiences:

One of the first things I noticed [at the alternative school] was, yes, some of the kids are different.... I was uneasy at first just because, well, you know.... But then I got more accustomed to it.... [As it turns out,] there are great kids out there [in the school] who are absolutely amazing in the movies or in the arts, or in math. Everybody's got that one thing they're really good at.

Emphasizing this idea even further, Mark turned to me and added, “I just want you to know, kids who are here are pretty outstanding kids.” Stepping, momentarily, out of my objective role as researcher, I found his assertion to be spot on—and told him so.

Connections to Teacher Modeling

In inspiring ways, participants' insights about their new and meaningful connections with peers echoed many of their sharings about good teachers—particularly in terms of the weight

they placed on seeing and being seen more authentically, as persons. While, in some cases, participants described this striking parallel without connecting it directly to teacher modeling, five of the nineteen participants (5/19) recognized *out loud* that teachers played a positive and direct role in their unfolding relationships with fellow students. For example, some participants, like Harlan and Brian, appreciated that teachers “taught [them] how to get friends” by offering advice and encouraging encounters with other students. Others, like Charlotte and Jack, recognized how good teachers’ sensitivity to the social contexts of their classrooms supported students in important ways. As Charlotte suggested, offering advice to anyone “starting as a teacher”:

Be aware of the social dynamics in your classroom. Definitely watch out for cliquey people who don’t always mix. But don’t always let people pick partners. When you do that and there is somebody people aren’t nice to, they’re going to leave them out. But don’t assign people partners without looking carefully. You have to know each of your students. You have to know who to put with who [for group work]. You have to know how to set up the classroom so that everyone can learn effectively. You want to make sure of that when you’re assigning groups or making seating arrangements. They say it’s not a big deal, but, really, where you seat people is a huge deal. It really affects how they learn and how they’re going to view what you teach them.

Just as research has shown that a teacher’s treatment of students can influence the way they see and treat each other—for better or for worse—(e.g., Cohen & Lotan, 1995; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Schmuck, 1963, 1966), these participants understood that the sensitive and thoughtful help they received from their teachers helped them to learn *and* to get along better with peers in the classroom. Moreover, like Rogers and Freiberg (1994), these participants recognized that “the ripple aspect of the teacher’s attitude...has effects that go on and on” (p. 161). Travis, for instance, explicitly pointed to the ways his teachers’ modeling helped him to pay forward his experiences of empathic understanding, recognition, and connection to other students. As he explained:

Giving somebody that sense of happiness and making them feel that they are worth something, that helps you...and I feel that that's what the teachers here do.... I try to do that here, too.... Now, I see a new person, a new student, and I go over and talk to them right away.

Whether participants adopted accepting attitudes and behaviors consciously (like Travis) or absorbed them more tacitly (like others described in the sections above), it seems clear that good teachers' authentic interactions with students made a powerful difference for them and others, in terms of their learning and social relationships. Yet, as I will describe next, participants also appreciated teachers' ongoing collaborations with *colleagues*, as these extended professional connections helped them to offer students even deeper levels of support.

Teacher-to-Teacher Relationships: A Broader Network of Support

While mentioned by fewer participants than the other relationships described in this chapter (3/19), *teacher-to-teacher* relationships emerged as a potentially powerful theme—particularly in light of the fact that this was the *only* major theme in my dissertation that did not apply across cases. Reflecting, perhaps, the different staffing patterns in each of the research sites (recall, for instance, that teachers at Ellis Academy remained on-site for the full day, while Civis High teachers rotated in and out of the program, with the exception of the lead teacher), only participants from Ellis Academy named teacher collaboration as a support to their learning. Reminiscent of Rudduck and Flutter's (2000) warning that students can reflect on and recall only what they've experienced, this seems a particularly important *finding by proxy*—especially given the wider suggestion in the literature about the benefits of authentic teacher collaboration (e.g., Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; DiPaola & Hoy, 2005; Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013; Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007).

All of that said, one participant from Ellis (pseudonym masked to protect confidentiality) explained that teachers “actually talking to each other” in his alternative school made it “easier

on the students.” In his prior school, he explained, “you’d be lucky if...[teachers] would talk within their own field.” Indeed, unlike more traditional school contexts, in which teachers frequently worked in isolation, shared few common times for collaborative work, and were increasingly called upon to compete against one another (Cuban, 2004, 2009; Hargreaves, 1992, 1994; Nichols & Berliner, 2007), teachers at Ellis Academy enjoyed a common lunch period and also met before and after school each day. As another participant from this program explained (pseudonym masked to protect confidentiality), this created a context that allowed teachers to be “really close and good friends”—and also to “act as one.” A third participant from this site (pseudonym again withheld for confidentiality) elaborated on this idea, and offered the following:

One thing that helps out this school...is the connection that each teacher has. It’s like a whole networking program, basically. Like, all the teachers are in touch with each other. They know what’s going on in the school. They tell each other [if something happens]...which happens a bit frequently, because...everyone has their different reasons for being here.

In the end, this participant shared, the Ellis teachers’ collaborations allowed them to know more sides of more stories more frequently—and to better function, together, as a truly “viable” resource and safety net for students.

Alternative School as Community: Everyone is Different, Everyone is Connected

Augmenting participants’ important insights about the range and diversity of relationships they experienced in their alternative schools, more than half of the student participants in my study (10/19) helped me to understand that it was the *bringing together* of these relationships—and the simultaneity of their evolutions—that helped to make their alternative school placements so special, unique, and helpful. As these participants shared, the convergence of relationships in their small learning communities provided them with invaluable

opportunities to learn, grow, and connect with *both* peers and teachers—and to feel accepted and understood in ways that inspired them to support others in return.

In light of this very powerful finding, I offer below, in Figure 10, a re-imagined visualization of authentic relationships in alternative schools that represents the synergistic intersection of diverse student-teacher, student-student, and teacher-teacher relationships with an array of overlapping circles. As Katy put it, hoping to describe something of this dynamic, “It’s just everyone—everyone here...[and the fact that you can] have different relationships with everyone.” Moreover, as I will describe in greater detail below, participants genuinely appreciated the chance their alternative schools afforded them to connect *differently* with different people—while recognizing, just as in Figure 10, that everyone was connected in the end.

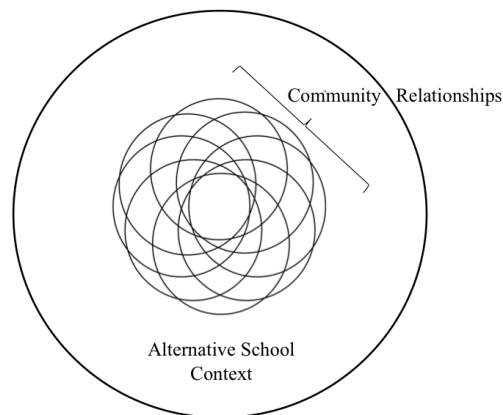


Figure 10: Community relationships in an alternative school context

Accordingly, in the sections that follow, I present participants’ reflections about these intersecting and overlapping relationships, particularly in relation to:

- Diversity amidst connection (8/19), and

- The school community as a different kind of family (7/19).

Diversity Amidst Connection

As I explained above, many participants (8/19) deeply appreciated the chance they were afforded in their alternative schools to be active and valued parts of a larger community. Representatively, for instance, Neil recognized that authentic “togetherness” was a defining part of his alternative school experience. As he explained, “I feel like [the alternative school] brings people together more.... It just works, and everyone is just growing together.” Keith was similarly proud of that fact that, in his alternative school, “everyone is connected”—and that each individual student and teacher could contribute meaningfully to the spirit and progress of the school. As he described of this interconnection and influence:

It adds on to the experience more because you feel tied into it a lot more. You feel like you help push this school forward. You’re not just a bystander. You’re evolving as the school is evolving, too. You aren’t left behind, because [the alternative school] is trying to push everybody forward.... No one should be left behind on that.

Ultimately, he shared, he and other students in the program “want to always feel like [they’re] a part of something, something bigger.” From his perspective, the ongoing and collaborative evolution of the school “proved” to students that they indeed were “all part of something”—and that their individual needs and contributions *mattered*.

Related to this, these eight participants recognized that each community member—whether student or teacher—had something special and valuable to offer the complex and continually evolving sets of relationships that constituted their alternative school experiences. As Frederick explained, for example, learning in school did not happen because of one particular teacher or one important friendship. Rather, it was dependent upon different interactions with different people over time. As he thoughtfully reflected, “I think that you don’t learn from one

specific person. You learn from a variety of people.” Charlotte similarly embraced the diversity she experienced and learned from in her alternative school. “It’s nice to have variations,” she explained, “[to] have different people. They bring different perspectives.” Keith, again, offered a very powerful idea when he explained, “In [the alternative school] you get something from every single kind of personality you can think of. Everyone here—no one here is alike. Everyone has something different about them and it makes them their own person.” Yet, as Mark understood, genuine opportunities to learn from and connect with others in schools were not the norm—especially for struggling or underperforming students. As he put it, “I’m really glad that I’m here in this school. I’m really glad to have found it.... There are a lot of kids out there that are like me, and they don’t get a place like this.”

A Different Kind of Family

Indeed, trying to capture some of what it felt like to be a part of a larger, authentic community of support, seven participants (7/19) characterized their alternative school teachers and classmates, together, as “a family away from home” (as Mark put it). While researchers have documented the academic benefits of learning in familial environments (e.g., Antrop-Gonzalez, 2006; Conchas, 2001; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012), these participants extended these ideas by emphasizing how such comfortable, accepting relationships *across a school community* allowed for mistakes—and forgiveness—as they learned with and from each other. Recognizing, for instance, that alternative schools were not perfect, and that people occasionally got “on each other’s nerves” (as Jack explained), these participants nonetheless understood that fighting or bickering did not undermine the deep fabric of their care for each other. In fact, these inevitable challenges—when handled openly, honestly, and respectfully—allowed community members to know each other more genuinely, to work through conflict in safe and supportive

ways, and to build a deeper kind of trust over time. As Travis explained, “That’s [just] what happens in a family.” Mark, too, shared something similar:

I truly, truly, truly, truly care for everybody here, no matter what it is that I [hear] or find out.... Everyone takes care of everybody—everybody’s a unit.... Yeah, you might get mad. Who doesn’t get mad? We’re human beings. We get mad at one another. But we don’t have hatred—at least, I’m very sure there’s no hatred. I haven’t seen any.

Ultimately, as these seven participants understood—and as the teachers and administrators at both schools also readily acknowledged—no school is perfect, and every day can bring both ups and downs. Nevertheless, these participants’ insights also raise up the important truth that authentic relationships can be deepened and refined by conflict—and that they require an evolving ability to manage, understand, and work through challenges in ways that respect and strengthen the integrity of one’s connections. In this way, the ideal of authentic community relationships as presented in this dissertation actually *includes and presupposes* the centrality of conflict in growth, and highlights as well the affirming potential of disagreements that disavow disparagement or antagonism in favor of genuine concern.

Put another way, participants’ extended school “families” offered them the larger, relational contexts and challenges they felt they needed to grow individually and collectively—and to safely “try on” bigger and more authentic identities as they navigated new and unknown ways of being and relating. As Travis explained, “I am given the opportunities [here at the alternative school] to be the best student and the best person that I can be—and the best community member—because we are more of a community, like a family.” Keith similarly recognized that being part of “a family of people that have what some people really need” is a rare privilege for students in schools—and, while hard to describe, is one that feels “really great” despite the occasional bumps in the road.

Pedagogical Connections

In light of the important findings about student-teacher, student-student, teacher-teacher, and school-wide relationships that I presented throughout this chapter, I offer, in this section, five pedagogical strategies for building and supporting authentic connections throughout a school community. Just as in previous chapters, my intention here is not to imply a comprehensive list, but rather to synthesize participants' wise suggestions and sharings. In this particular case, because I already integrated participants' specific examples into the thematic discussions above, I offer below a shorter summary of key ideas and takeaways.

Strategy 1: Reach Out to Students, Courageously

As described above, a number of participants appreciated when teachers—as the adult in the relationship—took the initiative to reach out and bridge the gap between teacher and student selves. Because inviting students into personal and meaningful learning relationships involves making oneself vulnerable to some degree and even risking rejection—especially when working with disaffected learners who may not immediately respond in kind—participants admired teachers' courage in seeking out genuine connections. In some cases, participants were even able to translate teachers' modeling into their *own* capacities for building and sustaining authentic relationships with others, as I will discuss again below.

Strategy 2: Reflect on Your Personal “Line” or Boundaries

Participants similarly respected teachers who were able to find a balance in their relationships with students—or teachers who could seamlessly couple discipline with fun, student interests with their own objectives, and personal sharing with professional propriety. While intuitively and sensitively maintaining appropriate boundaries and balance is inarguably a complex skill teachers develop and hone over time, it remains important for educators to

continually reflect on and consider their personal “lines” (as Damon and Charlie described them), as there is no one right way to share oneself with students (Cranton, 2006). Teachers may find it helpful, then, to consider questions like:

- What and how much about myself am I comfortable sharing with students?
- How much do I want to know about students’ personal lives?
- How will I make these expectations clear?

Strategy 3: Model Acceptance and Caring In and Out of Class

As participants shared throughout this and other chapters, they are *paying attention* to the ways teachers treat, think, and talk about students. Moreover, they acknowledged, when teachers model genuine care, acceptance, and respect for all learners in and out of class—even during times of conflict—these habits of thinking, being, and doing can influence students’ own capacities and inclinations for connection. Again, this finding points to the importance of teachers’ thoughtful *mindfulness* when interacting with others—and to the powerful potentialities of aligning intention with action.

Strategy 4: Recognize and Attend to Social Dynamics in the Classroom

As participants also pointed out, teachers can sensitively attend to classroom social dynamics in the structures, assignments, and interactive learning opportunities they create in and for class. Paying attention to and thoughtfully considering students’ social needs when designing classroom seating arrangements and/or facilitating pair and group work, for instance, emerged as potentially helpful strategies for scaffolding students’ relationships and learning.

Strategy 5: Check In With Colleagues

Participants’ insights also pointed toward the potentially powerful and positive effects of ongoing staff collaboration. Indeed, a number of participants (who were able to experience the

benefits of close teacher-to-teacher relationships because of the structure and staffing arrangements of their alternative school) recognized that their teachers' team approach was a powerful safety net and support for their learning—and also something not commonly found in schools. While, of course, teachers may not have the option to schedule collaborative meeting times into the school day itself, these findings suggest that making and prioritizing time to check in regularly with colleagues may yield meaningful results—especially when supporting struggling, disaffected, or underperforming students.

Chapter Summary & Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained that *all* of the student participants in my study (19/19) recognized that relationships—in one form or another—were a defining aspect of their time in alternative schools. Like Brion-Meisels and Jones (2012), who pointed out that “every major theory of human development identifies relationships as central” (p. 55), these participants appreciated that they were shaped, supported, inspired, and challenged in their learning and identities by a *variety* of school-based relationships. In particular, I focused on participants' (14/19) descriptions of their positive relationships with teachers—and the specific ways they felt good teachers fostered and maintained genuine connections with students over time. By offering a more detailed and up-close portrait of effective student-teacher relationships in action, these descriptions helped to augment our understandings of these very important connections, and also helped to translate Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) concept of an authentic relationship between *self* and *other* to the alternative school context.

Further expanding this conceptualization, I focused next on participants' experiences with other kinds of school-based relationships, including peer-to-peer (15/19) and teacher-to-teacher connections (3/19). Taking into account, as well, the value participants placed on a

wider network of relationships in their alternative school communities (10/19)—which included students and well as teachers—I concluded this discussion by offering a new visualization of the many and multifaceted interactions that, together, served as powerful supports for participants and their learning.

While my focus in this chapter was really on participants' sharings about the nature, meaning, and lived experiences of their multiple in-school relationships—with a particular emphasis on the roles good teachers played in each—it is important to remember that these relationships also encapsulated the ideas about *seeing* and *recognition* that I described in Chapters 5 and 6. In other words, for participants, positive school-based relationships were the *contexts* in which they could authentically grow and express themselves in school—and that allowed them, as well, to more genuinely see and connect with others as living, growing, evolving partners in learning. In Chapter 8, I will more directly bring together the findings from this and other chapters, and present an expanded model of authentic teaching for the alternative school context based on learnings from my study. I will also discuss the implications of this work, and avenues for future research.

Chapter VIII

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, & IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I review and bring together key findings from my dissertation and discuss implications for practice and policy. First, I revisit the rationale for my research, and consider again why the alternative school student participants who made this work possible add such a rich and valuable perspective to current, high-stakes debates about teacher quality, evaluation, and effectiveness. Then, in response to the increased call for student voice in education reform (e.g., Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006, 2010; Flutter, 2006; Kane, McCaffrey, Miller, & Staiger, 2013; Wilson & Corbett, 2001), I present a synthesized model for authentic teaching in alternative high schools, as suggested by participants' many insights and ideas.

In Chapters 5-7, I explored how participants' sharings complemented and extended a framework for authentic teaching, developed in and for the higher education context by Cranton and Carustetta (2004). I also described how my student participants' emphases on recognition and selfhood further suggested the promise and relevance of authenticity, as a guiding concept, for alternative school teaching. In this chapter, I accordingly *bring together* participants' powerful sharings about good teachers in an integrated model that more fully represents authentic teaching from this new and potentially critical angle.

After this, I explore the wider implications of my findings, beginning first with a focus on the *internal capacities* (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012) educators may need to teach in the ways student participants found most meaningful and helpful. In other words, I consider "the cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and intrapersonal capacities" teachers and other adults would need to hold *within themselves* in order to show up authentically in the classroom (Drago-

Severson, 2009, p. 8). I expand upon these ideas with developmental suggestions for educational leadership and professional development informed and inspired by Drago-Severson's (2004, 2009, 2012) models for learning-oriented leadership and leadership development that could help shape schools as more authentic sites of learning and relating. I conclude with a brief discussion of wider organizational and policy implications—specifically for teacher retention and evaluation—as these align most closely with my research purposes and questions.

Revisiting the Study's Purpose and Participants

In general, researchers, practitioners, and policy makers agree that teachers are the most important in-school factor for predicting student success (Johnson et al., 2004; Sanders, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Yet, there remains a noticeable lack of consensus among this same group about what constitutes a good teacher or how to prepare one (Imig & Imig, 2006; Kane & Staiger, 2012; Kennedy, 2008; Lagemann, 2000). While historical (e.g., Callahan, 1962; Flanders, 1968, 1974; Thorndike, 1905, 1921) and contemporary (e.g., Duncan, 2009; No Child Left Behind, 2002; Race to the Top, 2011) efforts to measure, define, and quantify the qualities and characteristics of good teachers have highlighted many key skills, practices, and knowledge domains essential to the profession, dominant constructions of teaching continue—even today—to emphasize measurable outcomes in teacher evaluations and personnel decisions (Colvin, 2010; Fuhrman, 2010; Ravitch, 2010; Springer, 2009; Staiger & Rockoff, 2010). Importantly, scholars, journalists, and researchers continue to argue that these current measures may not best serve the students they are designed to support (Ramirez, 2011; Ravitch, 2010b; Schwendenwein, 2012; Vevea, 2011), and also may not align with long-held and deeply treasured understandings of what it means to teach and learn (e.g., Buber, 1947; Greene, 1967, 1978; Hansen, 1995, 2001, 2011).

With this complex backdrop as context, my study was premised on the idea that students—as immediate participants in their own education—can and should contribute to wider understandings of what it means to be a good teacher. Given the growing call for a deeper exploration of students’ experiences in general (Flutter, 2006; Levin, 2000; Rudduck & Demetriou, 2003), and of the experiences of students targeted by educational interventions and reforms in particular (Cook-Sather, 2002; Garcia, 2006; Nieto, 1994; Wilson & Corbett, 2001; Yonezawa & Jones, 2009), my research synthesized learnings from nineteen alternative high school students about their experiences with and understandings of good teachers.

Importantly, I want to add here that my intention in this work was not to isolate the voices of students, or to unduly privilege learners’ perspectives over those of teachers, school leaders, parents, or other stakeholders. Rather, my hope was to highlight the inherent value of genuinely *listening* to students—of including them in the urgent and ongoing conversations about education, teaching, and school reform—in order to learn and benefit from their perspectives and experiences. As I describe again below, my sampling strategy allowed me to learn from a group of at-risk students who experienced a wide range of learning challenges, teaching styles, and educational contexts throughout their years in school—and who also described profound and powerful stories of educational *re-engagement* that they attributed, at least in part, to their work with their alternative school teachers. Because of this, their reflections helped to illuminate the kinds of teachers and teaching practices that *actually worked* for a group of students traditionally targeted by educational reforms—and they offered, also, an alternative perspective on what it means to teach, care for, support, and encourage some of our schools’ most vulnerable learners.

Study Participants: Diverse Experiences, Diverse Perspectives

As I described in Chapter 4, nineteen alternative high school students from two different alternative programs—Ellis Academy and Civis High School (pseudonyms)—volunteered to participate in this research. As you may recall, while the programs evinced a few key differences (e.g., Ellis was a stand-alone school while Civis was housed on the campus of a larger public high school; Ellis was staffed by full-time faculty while most Civis teachers split their time between the alternative and traditional high schools), both were smaller, relational programs of choice located in inner-ring suburbs outside of New York City, and both served students from multiple districts who did not fit or succeed in mainstream environments.

While I was interested in learning from participants at more than one site in order to enhance the validity of my findings, I was excited to learn that, in addition to these two alternative schools, the participants had experienced a variety of teachers and educational settings prior to their enrollment. Collectively, for instance, their reflections pulled from time in two urban school settings, eight different public suburban districts, one longer-term residential school, one different alternative school with a remedial/credit recovery focus, three private religious schools, and two homeschooling environments.

In addition to this, participants described a number of different challenges in these prior settings, which seriously impaired their experiences and led to their current alternative school enrollments. For example, as I shared in Chapter 4, these difficulties included:

- Social challenges/social withdrawal (15/19),
- Anxiety/depression (12/19),
- Academic underperformance/failure (11/19),
- Face-to-face and/or cyber-bullying (8/19),

- Non-attendance/cutting class (7/19),
- Learning or developmental challenges (6/19) (e.g., Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [5/19], Asperger's Syndrome [1/19]),
- Anger issues/disciplinary infractions (6/19), and/or
- Family illness/hardship (5/19).

Representing, then, a wide range of struggles that have been linked to student failure or dropout (Bowers & Sprott, 2012), the high frequency counts also made clear that many participants battled multiple challenges simultaneously.

Likewise, the participants in my study were similarly diverse in terms of culture and ethnicity. Seven participants, for instance, self-identified as students of color (including students who identified as African American, Latino, Asian, Middle-Eastern, and bi-racial), and three participants shared that at least one of their parents was born in a foreign country.

I offer all of this here, again, in order to emphasize the inspiring fact that, despite their myriad challenges, prior experiences, and perspectives, *all* of these participants described their alternative school as a more positive, helpful, and accepting place than their prior placements. In fact, participants' stories—which culminated, ultimately, in their academic *re-engagement*—included a number of powerful, meaningful, and even life-changing shifts that they attributed to their alternative settings, including:

- Academic/learning improvements (17/19),
- Social improvements (15/19), including increased acceptance *by* (13/19) and *of* others (11/19), and
- Personal growth/self-acceptance (13/19).

Moreover, as the high frequency counts again indicate, many participants reported improvements *across* the domains listed above, suggesting the multidimensional benefits of the kinds of teaching described throughout my dissertation for a diverse sample of alternative high school students. Next, I offer a summative synthesis of participants' ideas about good teachers, and discuss the ways they both complement and extend Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) model for authentic teaching in university settings.

Revisiting and Extending a Model for Authentic Teaching

After conducting a pilot study in 2009 with a different, smaller group of alternative high school students (as described in Chapters 1 and 2), I was struck by the *affective* nature of participants' descriptions of good teachers. In other words, I was struck by the fact that the pilot participants' sharings primarily addressed the emotional and interpersonal aspects of teaching, rather than particular kinds of lessons, pedagogical styles, or teachers' subject knowledge. Even when I probed to learn more about the kinds of *teaching* these pilot participants preferred, they pointed—again and again—to something about the *teacher* him- or herself. Indeed, more than any pedagogical approach, instructional technique, or topic of study, pilot study participants responded to the *person* who was teaching—to the way that an individual human being filled up and inhabited the role of teacher. As perhaps was no surprise, *no* participant answered my questions about what makes a good teacher with a response like, “A good teacher is a teacher who helps the most students get the best test scores.”

While I sat with these pilot findings for some time, thinking about what they meant, and about how I could best make sense of them for others and myself, I came across Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) framework for authentic teaching while researching an entirely different topic (i.e., Mezirow's [1991, 2000] transformative learning theory)—and, to my surprise, their model

helped to crystallize the essence of what these pilot participants shared with me. Just as when, during an eye exam, an optometrist drops a lens that suddenly and noticeably brings your field of vision into focus, the framework's five dimensions of *self*, *other*, the *relationship between the two*, an *awareness of context*, and a *critically reflective approach* helped me to more clearly understand what participants had been telling me about good teachers. Because of this—and despite the fact that the framework was developed in and for the higher education context—I was eager to explore the potential applicability of these ideas for alternative education as part of my dissertation research.

As I have described throughout the previous chapters, the nineteen student participants who shared their ideas, experiences, and insights in my current research did indeed generate a compelling and nuanced portrait of good teachers that helped to extend Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) framework to this new context. While I did not ask participants about these ideas directly during interviews (as one can see from my interview protocols in Appendices A and B), it was amazing to see how, once again, so much of what participants shared aligned with and enriched this idea of authentic teaching.

Moreover, while others in the higher education context have begun to pick up and discuss Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) model (e.g., Cranton, 2006b; Hunt, 2006; Lin, 2006), this is the first study, to the best of my knowledge, that considers authentic teaching specifically from the perspectives of "at-risk" adolescent participants. Furthermore, while prior research about student perceptions of good teachers has highlighted many key qualities—such as care, helpfulness, flexibility, respect, and understanding (e.g., Castleberry & Enger, 1998; De La Ossa, 2005; Quinn et al., 2006; Schussler & Collins, 2006)—my research shines a light on the fundamental interrelationship of these important characteristics, and the ways they may work together as parts

of a larger construct. In light of this important contribution, and in order to offer a more synthesized reimagining of the model for authentic teaching as a promising guide for supporting struggling or disaffected students in alternative high school contexts, I offer below:

- A brief summary of key thematic points,
- An integrative table that brings together key findings about *seeing students*, *teaching with self*, and *authentic relationships* (including visual representations of each component of the model, participants' thematic sharings, and pedagogical takeaways suggested by participants' stories and experiences), and
- A reflective discussion of these findings as a whole.

Thematic Summary of Key Findings

As I shared in Chapters 4 and 6, the student participants in my research pointed toward important issues about contextual policies and structures, as well as teachers' reflective capacities, that mirrored Cranton and Carusetta's original inclusion of a teacher's *awareness of context* and *critically reflective approach* as key components of their model. While I will touch upon these elements when considering the implications of my research later in this chapter, I focus, next, on participants' ideas about *seeing students*, *teaching with self*, and *authentic relationships* that sit at the heart of this reconstructed model, as they most directly answered my research questions about students' perceptions of good teachers.

Seeing students. For all nineteen participants in my study (19/19), a teacher's ability to care about and understand students was the starting point for their definitions of good teachers. While this emphasis on respectful recognition involved knowing students both academically and personally, fifteen of the nineteen participants (15/19) also stressed the importance of being seen, fundamentally, as worthwhile, valuable, and capable human beings. As I described in Chapter 5,

this simple but profound act of being *recognized* by teachers (in the psychological sense) yielded powerful benefits for these participants' learning, lives, and identity development. More specifically, thirteen participants (13/19) expressly shared that being seen in affirmative, positive ways by teachers and others in their school communities helped them to find or reconnect with their “selves”—or who they wanted and felt themselves to be, fundamentally.

Teaching with self. As I discussed in Chapter 6, participants also emphasized the importance of seeing and knowing their teachers as “real” and genuine people as an important counterweight to being seen themselves. In particular, sixteen of the nineteen student participants in my research (16/19) explained that a good teacher's effectiveness largely stems from his or her personality, passion, or self. And, they shared, too, that a teacher's “realness” (or the ways he or she feels knowable and relatable to students) precipitated participants' natural interest and respect. In light of historical and contemporary constructions of teaching as a “selfless” act—as one directed *by* or conducted *for* others, for instance—participants' emphasis on *teaching with self* (as I have called it) is of particular importance.

Relating, authentically. Despite participants' emphases on individual identity and personhood—for both students and teachers—it was clear from their sharings that their thinking was not individualistic, in the sense of being focused only on their own welfare or success. In other words, while the participants were concerned with individual expressions and developments of self, they simultaneously appreciated the mutuality of others' growth, and evinced a broader concern for the complex relationships that permeated their school communities. Recognizing, for instance, the deep significance of student-teacher relationships (14/19), student-to-student relationships (15/19), and even teacher-to-teacher relationships (3/19) to their learning, these participants experienced connections with others as important parts of

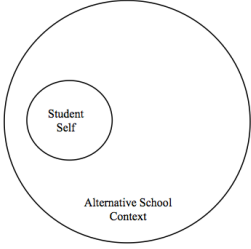
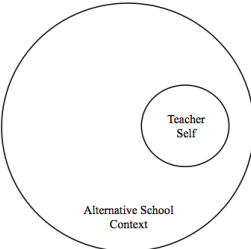
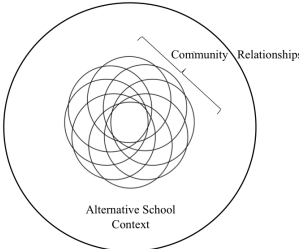
who they were and how they learned. Indeed, more than half (10/19) expressly articulated that it was the wider constellation of relationships in their alternative schools that made these learning contexts such special, supportive, and affirming communities (10/19).

An Integrated Representation of Authentic Teaching in Alternative Schools

In order to bring together key findings from my research, I present below in Table 5 an integrated representation of authentic teaching in alternative schools that includes the visualizations of each component of the model, participants' thematic descriptions of good teachers, and pedagogical takeaways suggested by participants' stories and examples.

Table 5

A Synthesis of Central Findings: Authentic Teaching in Alternative Schools

<i>Component of the Model</i>	<i>Participants' Descriptions of Good Teachers</i>	<i>Related Pedagogical Strategies</i>
<p>Seeing Students</p> 	<p>According to participants, good teachers...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand and care about students—both academically and personally, • Demonstrate patience and persistence in the face of student challenges, and • Look beyond first impressions or assumptions to see value and possibility in students 	<p>Incorporate / build upon student interests</p> <p>Differentiate instruction to meet student needs</p> <p>Offer flexible opportunities for “open” learning</p> <p>Treat all students well</p> <p>Keep at it</p> <p>Stop and notice</p>
<p>Teaching With Self</p> 	<p>According to participants, good teachers show...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive motivations, • Genuine passion and interest, and • Authentic selves—as manifested by personal teaching styles and expressions of “realness” 	<p>Remember and reflect on your motivations</p> <p>Mean it</p> <p>Share your self and your passions</p> <p>Be willing to laugh</p> <p>Be flexible</p>
<p>Relating, Authentically</p> 	<p>According to participants, good teachers...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate positive relationships with students, • Establish and maintain natural but essential boundaries with students, • Hold a unique position in students' lives, • Serve as models and supports for student-student relationships • Build strong connections with colleagues and all throughout the school community 	<p>Reach out to students, courageously</p> <p>Reflect on your personal “line” or boundaries</p> <p>Model acceptance and caring in and out of class</p> <p>Recognize and attend to social dynamics in the classroom</p> <p>Make time for collegial check-ins and collaboration</p>

Next, I offer a reflective discussion about my dissertation findings as well as the wider concept of authenticity in teaching. In addition, I provide a preliminary but vital look at the ways authenticity, as a guiding principle, can inform and/or be informed by the literature about culturally responsive teaching (e.g., Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Rodriguez, 2012).

Looking Back on Key Findings—And Looking Forward: A Reflective Discussion

Looking back on findings from my research, I find it both fascinating and inspiring to consider how participants' ideas reflected and pulled together diverse learnings about teachers and teaching from the wider literature. Their sharings echoed, for instance, empirical *and* philosophical ideas about honoring and acknowledging student identities in pedagogical practice (e.g., Buber, 1947; Cornelius-White, 2007; Deci & Ryan, 1997; Faircloth, 2009; Levin, 2000; Moustakas, 1959; Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006; Newmann, Marks & Gamoran, 1995, 1996; Rubie-Davies, 2006, 2008; Vallerand, Fortier & Guay, 1997). Likewise, they augmented the rich literature about school-based relationships as supports to student learning (e.g., Anderman & Kaplan, 2008; Carothers, 1995; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004; Faircloth, 2009; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Lewis, Ream, Bocian, Fast, Cardullo, & Hammond, 2012; Noddings, 1984, 2005, 2013). Yet, perhaps even more compellingly, participants' emphases on teacher selfhood and identity raised up discussions about the person who fills the role of teacher that have beckoned K-12 educators for some time (e.g., Buber, 1947; Dewey, 1938; Greene, 1978; Hansen, 1995, 2001, 2011; Higgins, 2011; Moustakas, 1959; Palmer, 2007).

Nevertheless, recognizing the fundamental value of a teacher as a person raises a number of important questions in our current educational context, which I consider next before discussing the wider implications of this research in the sections that follow. First, for instance, I

respond briefly to the kinds of questions people have asked me about authenticity when I describe my findings—by planting a proverbial flag in the ground and explaining what authentic teaching, from my perspective, *is not*. I also consider the how this framework may intersect with critical issues of race and culture, which did not emerge as central themes in participants’ sharings, but feel important to consider further given the growing diversity of students in our schools.

Authenticity—what it is not. As I shared in Chapter 6, participants’ appreciations of a teacher’s authenticity did not supersede the importance of content mastery, pedagogical skill, or academic standards. They did not, for instance, suggest that a teacher should simply follow his or her whims in the classroom or unthinkingly utter whatever came to mind in a given moment in order to be “real.” In other words, participants were not advocating for academic, curricular, or personal relativism—in which anything a teacher does “goes” so long as it is heartfelt—but rather for a mindful, intentional, living, and growing teacher who could model authentic interest, passion, connection, and even fallibility with and for participants and other students.

Similarly, and as I shared above and in prior chapters, student participants’ emphasis on being *seen* and *valued* for who they were was not individualistic or exclusively self-focused. While they of course cared deeply for their own growth and development, they also cared about the ways other students were treated. And, they genuinely appreciated opportunities to connect authentically with others as active and contributing members of their classroom and school communities. In this way, just as Taylor’s (1991) concept of “horizons of significance” (p. 39) helped to resituate the idea of authenticity within a larger ethical framework, a deeper look at the psychological and philosophical roots of self-realization illuminates the educative and social

significance of such a seemingly private focus. As a number of scholars have reminded us, for example, personal identity always involves intimate understandings of inter-subjectivity and relationality (Bandura, 1993; Faircloth, 2012; Hansen, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). From this view, *who we are* sits in inextricable relationship to the wider constellation of values, cultures, structures, individuals, and groups with whom we share our lives, and growing oneself simultaneously contributes to the larger whole of society—so long as we share ourselves with others.

Put this way, authenticity in alternative education—as described by participants throughout this dissertation—is neither an easy solution nor a blueprint for addressing the current and mounting challenges that define education today. Without specific prescriptions or technical remedies, for instance, authenticity prioritizes intrinsic interest, selfhood, and collaborative co-constructions of meaning—and recognizes *sameness* as an inadequate response to the rich diversity in and of our schools. Moreover, as Dirx (2006) understood in the higher education context, nurturing and prioritizing authenticity does not guarantee good teaching, for authentic teaching is a process that requires developmental capacities and “a profound commitment of time and intellectual and emotional energy” (as cited by Cranton, 2006, p. 86).

In this way, authenticity can never be a mandate or a box simply to be checked on a form (i.e., as in “yes,” she *is* an authentic teacher, or “no,” he is not). Rather, as the participants in my research described it, authentic teaching is the *hardest* kind of teaching—as it involves feeling deeply, admitting vulnerability, and risking pedagogical practice that puts one’s values, interests, and self on the line. Likewise, just as people are never done learning, growing, or developing (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012), the process of becoming an authentic teacher is likely never finished or completed. Indeed, as I imagine it now after learning from the wise student

participants in my research, authenticity is, in essence, an ideal—one toward which teachers and students can strive, together, on their mutual journeys of becoming.

Questions of race and culture. Noticeably absent from participants' descriptions of good teachers was the mention of race and culture. Perhaps because of my own positionality as a white, female researcher, or perhaps because the majority of teachers at both research sites were also white, student participants did not explicitly address the intersection of race and authenticity in their interviews. While, as I describe below, many of their ideas about good teachers accorded with key principles of culturally-responsive teaching (e.g., Berman, 2004; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1985; Lee, 2007), it seems important to further consider—briefly here, but more carefully in future research—how race and culture may influence individual students' and teachers' orientations to authenticity.

Parallels to culturally responsive teaching. Central to the idea of culturally responsive or culturally relevant teaching is a teacher's ability to affirm and value individual students' personal and cultural identities in their teaching and classrooms (e.g., Berman, 2004; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1985; Lee, 2007). Given the increasing diversity of the wider student body—as well as the push toward more standardized curricula and pedagogy in schools that serve cultural and linguistic minority students—this idea of truly recognizing and honoring the unique cultural, familial, and personal experiences everyone brings to school seems critically important (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Schultz, Jones-Walker, & Chikkatur, 2008)—and also aligns with participants' emphasis on authentic recognition in this research. While student participants' descriptions of being seen and valued were more person-centered than color-based, scholars and thinkers have employed the lens of recognition to better understand and interpret individuals' experiences with race and racism in and out of schools

(e.g., Fanon, 1963, 1967; Rodriguez, 2012). Indeed, as Rodriguez (2012) explained when describing his model for a praxis of recognition for Latina/o students, the quest to provide all students with more transformative, affirming, and empowering educational experiences ultimately involves understanding how social, political, and economic conditions impact youth of color. As Cranton (2006b) similarly reflected about the complex tasks and responsibilities of authentic teachers:

It seems we [educators] need to help learners articulate and questions their own assumptions about power, gender, culture, and learning, and help them to find their own way to be and feel empowered in a broad social and global context that includes all of these complexities. (p. 85)

Yet, as I explain below, such manifestations of authenticity underscore the importance of teachers as “coexplorers” of these vital issues (Cranton, 2006b, p. 85)—and also call into question the ways teachers’ own cultural backgrounds may influence their orientations to authenticity (Lin, 2006).

Demands for educator openness and reflectiveness. Just as the student participants in my research intuitively understood that the limits of a teacher’s self could potentially restrict his or her practice and effectiveness (as I described in Chapter 6), a number of scholars have likewise recognized that teachers’ inadvertent biases and prejudices can interfere with culturally responsive teaching—even when teachers profess a value for diversity and inclusiveness (e.g., Ahmed, 2012; Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Rubie-Davies, 2006, 2008; Sleeter, 2001; Zembylas, 2010). Researchers have documented, for instance, that superficial, false, or sentimentalized caring often occurs in schools (even if unintentionally), particularly when racial majority teachers teach students from minority groups (e.g., Boltanski, 1999; Fasching-Varner & Dodo Seriki, 2012). As Berlant (2004) similarly explained, when caring for others remains only at surface-deep levels, it fails to genuinely take into account or address larger modalities of racism

and inequity that perpetuate suffering and oppression. As such, even well-intentioned caring of this kind may be *inauthentic* from my study participants' perspectives, in that it is unaccompanied by action.

On the contrary, however, the ideal of authentic teaching as described by participants presupposes a teacher's ability to align thinking and doing—and to learn from and value others while simultaneously bringing one's own experiences and values to bear. From a racial or cultural perspective, for instance, this could involve caringly and authentically inviting students' personal, familial, and cultural experiences into a classroom's community and curricula, while also sharing one's own traditions, ideas, or perspectives—however these aspects of self may overlap or diverge. Reminiscent of descriptions of educational cosmopolitanism, which Hansen (2010) described as “an orientation of receptivity, of critical openness to the new and critical loyalty to the known” (p. 17), such a balance is about mutually broadening and enriching interactions in order to bring new light and perspectives to important matters of living, learning, and growing. It is, in other words, about creating and sustaining contexts that welcome the seemingly limitless diversity of human experiences and perspectives as a way toward more thoughtful, open, and inclusive ways of being with oneself and others in the world.

Nevertheless, as I will describe next, such an authentic or cosmopolitan orientation toward diversity in education may require internal work and ongoing support for teachers striving to relate and see in these important and powerful ways.

Implications and Future Directions: A Developmental Reframing of Authenticity

Looking back at participants' descriptions of authentic teaching in alternative schools, as well as the above discussion about diversity, it seems clear that fully embodying authentic ideals in the classroom may take the work of a lifetime. Like Maxine Greene's dictum about selfhood,

“I am who I am not yet” (as cited by Pinar, 1998, p. 1), embracing authenticity in teaching may mean recognizing that *who one is* and *who one wants to be* really matter for students—and that the fullest expressions of a one’s self may develop over time and with experience (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004b; Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Moreover, from a developmental perspective, it seems clear that different teachers will orient *differently* to the idea of authenticity based on their ways of knowing, or the qualitatively different ways in which they make sense of their life experiences (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000).

Accordingly, in the sections that follow, I describe the ways that Kegan’s (1982, 1994, 2000) constructive-developmental theory—and Drago-Severson’s (2004, 2009, 2012) extensions of it—can serve as promising lenses for understanding and supporting authentic teaching in alternative schools and other contexts. Carrying forward these developmental ideas—particularly Drago-Severson’s (2004, 2009, 2012) models for learning-oriented school leadership and leadership development—I close by offering suggestions for educational leadership and professional development that could help shape schools as more authentic sites of learning and relating for all school participants.

Constructive-Developmental Theory and Ways of Knowing

A Neo-Piagetian stage theory that addresses cognitive, affective, inter- and intrapersonal development across the lifespan, constructive-developmental theory helps us to understand that adults make meaning of their experiences in very different ways—and also that, with the appropriate supports and challenges, growth can continue throughout adulthood (Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000). More specifically, the theory suggests that adults make meaning primarily with one of three ways of knowing—which Drago-Severson (2004, 2009, 2012) defined as the windows

through which a person sees the world. In other words, one's way of knowing is a big part of both *who* and *how* a person is as a teacher and as an individual.

Outlining the three ways of knowing most common in adulthood, Drago-Severson (2004, 2009, 2012) described some adults as “rule-bound” (instrumental knowers), others as subject to the opinions and feedback of valued others (socializing knowers), and still others as driven by their own internal values and standards (self-authoring knowers). While each of these ways of knowing has both strengths and weaknesses, and is deliberately disassociated from intelligence levels, they do constitute a hierarchy, with individuals growing incrementally toward increasingly sophisticated ways of knowing as they develop new internal capacities.

Below, in Table 6, I provide a brief overview of these most prevalent ways of knowing, including defining concerns for each and common developmental challenges for individuals who make meaning in these ways.

Table 6

The Three Ways of Knowing Most Common in Adulthood

<i>Way of Knowing</i>	<i>Person's Orienting Concerns</i>	<i>Developmental Challenges</i>
Instrumental (Rule-based self)	<p>Depends on rules and the “right” way to act and do things.</p> <p>Is concerned with concrete consequences.</p> <p>Decisions are based on what the self will acquire.</p> <p>Others are experienced as helpers or obstacles to meeting concrete needs.</p> <p>Person does not yet have the capacity for abstract thinking or generalizing from one context to another.</p>	<p>Remaining open to possibilities for multiple “right” solutions and pathways to resolving issues and problems.</p> <p>Growing capacities for abstract thinking.</p>
Socializing (Other-focused self)	<p>Depends on external authority, acceptance, and affiliation.</p> <p>Self is defined by important others’ judgments and expectations.</p> <p>Is oriented to inner states.</p> <p>Self feels responsible for others’ feelings and holds others responsible for own feelings.</p> <p>Criticism and conflict threaten the fabric of the self.</p>	<p>Generating one’s own internal values and standards.</p> <p>Understanding that conflicting perspectives and points of view can enhance collaboration and shared decision making without threatening interpersonal relationships.</p>
Self-Authoring (Reflective self)	<p>Self generates and replies to internal values and standards.</p> <p>Criticism is evaluated according to internal standards.</p> <p>Ultimate concern is with one’s own competence and performance.</p> <p>Self can balance contradictory feelings.</p> <p>Conflict is viewed as natural and enhances one’s own and others’ perspectives to achieve larger organizational and systemic goals.</p>	<p>Remaining open to seemingly opposing points of view, perspectives, and ideologies.</p> <p>Reflecting on and critiquing one’s own perspective and ideology.</p>

Note. Adapted from *Learning and Leading for Growth: Developmental Strategies for Building Capacity in Our Schools* (p. 60-61), by E. Drago-Severson, J. Blum-DeStefano, and A. Asghar, 2013, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin/Sage. See also Drago-Severson (2004, 2009, 2012).

Varying Capacities for Authenticity

Because, as suggested above, a teacher's way of knowing shapes his or her (a) understandings of the roles and responsibilities of teaching, (b) relationships with valued others such as colleagues, supervisors, and students, and (c) philosophies about what it means to be a good teacher, a teacher's developmental capacities will likely *also* influence his or her abilities to teach authentically (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Recognizing this connection in educational leadership, for instance, Drago-Severson (2012) explained that:

[T]he capacity to know oneself and to be authentic is intimately connected to a person's way of knowing. For example, a person who makes meaning with a socializing way of knowing will make sense of and enact the idea of being authentic in a very different way than a self-authoring leader or teacher leader.... [Yet], [p]eople can become more authentic and develop greater self-knowledge as they learn and grow as leaders and human beings. (p. 65)

As I described in Chapter 6, participants in my research already named teachers' externally-driven practice (e.g., being run by the rules [7/19], prescribed curricula [6/19], or the need for others' approval [5/19]) as significant obstacles to authentic teaching. A developmental perspective helps make clear that *all* of these challenges may be developmental in nature. Teachers with an instrumental way of knowing, for instance, will be run by their understandings of the "right" way to do things, just as teachers with a socializing way of knowing will have difficulty taking perspective on their interpersonal relationships (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Relatedly, as I also shared in Chapter 6, four participants (4/19) *noticed* when teachers had difficulty taking students' perspectives, regulating their own emotions, or making themselves vulnerable—all of which are developmental capacities (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012).

Just as research suggests that the demands of modern life currently outpace many adults' internal capacities (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012; Kegan & Lahey, 2009), and that certain kinds

of professional positions—like leadership posts—require at least some degree of self-authorship (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012), it may also be the case that authentic teaching, as described by participants, calls for similar degrees of developmental sophistication. Like leaders of all kinds, authentic teachers (from participants’ perspectives) need to understand others’ points-of-view while simultaneously holding onto and growing their own—no small feat given the fact that not too long ago only 18% of adults made meaning with a self-authoring way of knowing (Kegan, 1994). While this number has probably climbed in the years since Kegan’s (1994) study was conducted (Drago-Severson, 2012; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, Asghar, 2013), and while research suggests that a small but increasing number of adults now make meaning *beyond* the self-authoring way of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012; McCallum, 2008; Nicolaides, 2008), participants’ reflections about good teachers nevertheless suggest that educators will need different kinds of developmental supports and challenges as they work toward teaching authentically.

Accordingly, in Table 7 below, I describe the challenges that teachers with each of the three most common ways of knowing in adulthood may face when trying to teach in the authentic ways described by participants—as well as potential developmental supports that could help them in this work. Informed and inspired by Drago-Severson’s (2004, 2009, 2012) models of learning-oriented school leadership and leadership development, which emphasize the importance of offering adults developmental supports and challenges in order to build capacity and facilitate growth, I offer these ideas here as a way of thinking *differently* about authenticity in schools.

Table 7

Developmental Supports and Challenges for Authentic Teaching in Alternative Schools

<i>Way of Knowing</i>	<i>Teachers' Challenges About Authentic Teaching</i>	<i>Developmental Supports For Authentic Teaching</i>
Instrumental (Rule-based self)	<p>Remaining open to possibilities for teaching beyond prescribed curricula, rules, or standards.</p> <p>Fully taking another's perspective, including students' and colleagues'.</p> <p>Reflecting on one's own motivations and values, as these are externally driven.</p>	<p>Introduce the concept of authentic teaching as a kind of teaching that research suggests "works."</p> <p>Offer concrete models and examples of authentic practice, and additional resources / materials to scaffold emerging capacities.</p> <p>Reward innovation, differentiation, and reflection in evaluations and other measures.</p>
Socializing (Other-focused self)	<p>Generating one's own standards for quality teaching that may be different from valued others'.</p> <p>Developing a personal teaching style that reflects one's internal values, interests, and standards.</p> <p>Engaging in conflict with students and/or colleagues without feeling torn up inside.</p> <p>Sharing one's own feelings and perspectives with valued others when ideas may not align.</p>	<p>Acknowledge and appreciate expressions of care for students and colleagues—and for meeting individual learning needs and preferences.</p> <p>Encourage a relational approach to teaching and learning.</p> <p>Model engaging in difficult conversations with students and colleagues.</p>
Self-Authoring (Reflective self)	<p>Remaining open to ideas and philosophies about teaching and learning that may not align with one's own.</p> <p>Recognizing aspects of one's self in diverse others—and infusing alternative perspectives into one's practice.</p> <p>Reflecting on and growing one's own philosophy and approach to teaching.</p>	<p>Provide opportunities for flexible teaching and implementation of rules, standards, and policies.</p> <p>Invite critique of new initiatives or curricula.</p> <p>Acknowledge and appreciate teachers' unique contributions and the value they bring, personally, to the school community.</p> <p>Encourage formal and informal leadership and collegial collaboration.</p>

Note. Adapted from *Learning and Leading for Growth: Developmental Strategies for Building Capacity in Our Schools* (p. 60-61), by E. Drago-Severson, J. Blum-DeStefano, and A. Asghar, 2013, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin/Sage. See also Drago-Severson (2004, 2009, 2012).

As described above and in Table 7, constructive-developmental theory helps to illuminate the real challenge many teachers will have putting some or all of the core components of the authentic teaching model into practice, including seeing students, teaching with self, and relating authentically. Indeed, without the developmental capacities to take broader perspectives on others and their own self-systems (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012), some teachers may unintentionally push away or objectify students, precluding the “mutual tuning-in relationship” or the “experience of the ‘We’” that social philosopher Alfred Schutz defined as “the foundation of all possible communication” (as cited by Greene, 1978, p. 27-28). Moreover, it has been well-documented that educators demonstrate varying capacities for the types of reflective practice that could undergird growth in the core areas of the authentic teaching model (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012; Hagger et al., 2008; Hughes, 2009; Marcos, Miguel, & Tillema, 2009; Merriam et al., 2007; Ng & Tan, 2009). So, the question remains, how can educational leaders and professional developers better support teachers’ growth toward more authentic forms of practice?

Developmental Implications for Educational Leadership and Professional Development

In light of the important question shared above—as well as the larger bureaucratic, political, and organizational constraints that can challenge authentic teaching and learning (Au, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Drago-Severson, 2012; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013; Higgins, 2011; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ravitch, 2010)—I offer in this section a few suggestions about leadership and professional learning paradigms that may align with the idea of authenticity in education. While pulled from the wider higher education, organizational, and K-12 contexts, these ideas nonetheless hold promise for supporting authentic teacher practice in alternative schools, just as participants’ descriptions of authentic alternative school

teachers may have implications for improving teaching and learning beyond the confines of these smaller programs.

Perhaps most simply, effectively supporting authentic teaching in alternative schools and in other contexts would involve learning and teaching about the kinds of ideas discussed throughout this dissertation. As Sergiovanni (1994) recognized, the language we use to orient ourselves to educational endeavors may significantly impact the ways we conceive of questions and answers alike. Similarly, others have recognized the power and helpfulness of theory as a lens for better considering and understanding practice (e.g., Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012; Simon, 1994). Accordingly, just having a framework to think and talk about ways to better serve struggling or disaffected students could make a big difference for pre-service and in-service teachers, as well as those working to support them.

More complexly, effectively supporting teachers' day-to-day authentic practice in the field may require school leadership and professional development that reach beyond informational or technical solutions in education (e.g., Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002; Cranton & King, 2003; Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013; Jurov, 2009; Prestridge, 2009; Wagner, Kegan, Lahey, Lemons, Garnier, Helsing, Howell, & Rasmussen, 2006)—and that involve “educators as whole persons” (Cranton & King, 2003, p. 33). While a specific framework for authentic- or authenticity-supportive leadership is still on the horizon (Mazutis & Slawinski, 2008), and more research is needed to better understand the kinds of leadership and professional development supports that teachers of at-risk students name as most conducive to authentic teaching, a number of existing leadership and professional development paradigms align with the collegiality, internal development, and innovation that characterize authentic teaching as described by participants (e.g., Ackerman &

Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002; Cranton & King, 2003; Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013; Mezirow, 1997; Palmer, 2007).

Cranton and King (2003), for instance, suggested five strategies for fostering transformative workplace learning and whole-person growth, including action planning, reflective activities, case studies, curriculum development, and critical theory discussions. Mezirow (1997) likewise offered metaphor analysis, concept mapping, life histories, and critical incident reflection as promising approaches to professional consciousness-raising.

As suggested in the sections above, Drago-Severson's (2004, 2009, 2012) learning-oriented models for leadership and leadership development also offer promising approaches to supporting authentic practice. Built on four pillar practices for growth—teaming, mentoring, collegial inquiry, and providing leadership roles—these models recognize the importance of ongoing and integrated developmental supports for *all* adults in schools, and put educators' personal and professional growth at the center of school improvement. Indeed, by reframing and infusing collaborative practices with what she calls “developmental intentionality” (2012, p. 89), Drago-Severson's models and pillar practices can effectively support diverse adults at the individual and group levels *simultaneously*—and have been effectively employed and adapted by educational leaders, teacher educators, and professional developers in a multitude of contexts to help educators grow their own and others' capacities (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano & Asghar, 2013).

More specifically, given student participants' recognition of the value of faculty collaboration—and the fact that research suggests that school leaders do not always know *how* to effectively support teacher learning in collaborative groups (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2000; Little, 2001; Little & Horn, 2007)—Drago-Severson's (2004, 2009, 2012)

intentional, developmental approach to scaffolding collegial interactions in the pillar practices could help teachers grow into and embody authentic practice more fully over time. In fact, in a recent literature review of authenticity as an emerging concept in education, Kreber, Klampfleitner, McCune, Bayne, and Knottenbelt (2007) recognized that “authenticity in teaching may be associated with a tendency to approach teaching in ways consistent or at least compatible with constructive-developmental pedagogy” (p. 31). In light of this and the important connections mentioned above, Drago-Severson’s (2004, 2009, 2012) ideas—like Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004)—may be particularly useful for principals and other leaders of adult learning hoping to better support authentic teaching in schools. Moreover, given the promising connection between supporting adult development in schools and improved student achievement (Drago-Severson, 2012; Guskey, 1999; Murnane & Willett, 2010), the striking parallels between building educators’ internal capacities and growing authentic teachers seem all the more timely and urgent in our current accountability context.

Additional Implications and Directions

Of course, teachers’ internal capacities are not the only challenges to authentic teaching as I have described it throughout this dissertation. In fact, constructive-developmental theory helps us to look—with real hopefulness (Drago-Severson, 2009)—toward educators’ evolving, growing selves, and beyond tired understandings of teachers as the intractable problems of school change (Cohen, 1990; Drago-Severson, 2009). Indeed, the participants I learned from truly valued their teachers—even those that were less than perfect—and they pointed clearly as well to larger professional, organizational, and policy constraints that they felt limited their teachers’ expressions of self and authenticity. They named, for instance, the large size and bureaucracy of most schools (7/19) and the conflicting professional pressures teachers were

forced to navigate (8/19) as significant contextual challenges to the kinds of teaching they found most helpful and meaningful. Recognizing—like these participants and also Cranton and Carusetta (2004, 2004b)—the important interplay between context and authentic teaching, I offer below a brief discussion of the challenges associated with the organizational context of education, as well as the importance of valuing authentic teaching in teacher retention and evaluation policy.

Organizational Considerations

Given the tenacious hold of what Tyack and Cuban (1995) described as the “grammar of schooling” (p. 85), and what others have identified as the relatively stable characteristics of “real” schools over time (Goodson, 1992; Metz, 1989, p. 75), change often remains an elusive goal in education—and innovative teaching, leading, and learning often run the risk of devolving toward the status quo (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006). In many ways, organizational theory helps to explain why re-imagining school structures, curricula, and patterns of staffing and classroom participation can be so hard (Metz, 1989). In fact, as Meyer and Rowan (1983) explained, “schools gain enormous resources by conforming to...[conventional standards], incorporating them, and controlling them” (p. 72). Adhering to the institutional rules of school, then, legitimizes and enhances the prestige of educational organizations—and reassures both internal and external stakeholders that education, as traditionally understood, is taking place. This pattern seems especially relevant in our heightened accountability context, in which an educational organization’s funding and reputation are often directly related to student performance outcomes and the adoption of favored initiatives (e.g., Race to the Top, 2011; Shakman, Riordan, Sanchez, Cook, Fournier, & Brett, 2012).

Accordingly, even small efforts to shift the underlying structures and logics of schooling—both from the ground up and from the top down—are often met with resistance, especially when new ideas conflict with the rules, schema, norms, and routines that promote a school’s survival and success (Metz, 1989; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2004). In fact, in a recent longitudinal study of school leaders who were working to prioritize teacher growth and development (i.e., an approach that, as described above, may have promising parallels to supporting authentic teaching), inhospitable norms emerged as one of the most pressing challenges leaders needed to confront (Drago-Severson, et al., 2013). Nevertheless, as these leaders also made clear, change is a process—and even small successes and shifts in structures and culture can make a big difference over time (Drago-Severson et al., 2013).

Similarly, my dissertation findings suggest the importance of thinking strategically about organizational and logistical factors in alternative schools—including class and program size, student and staff scheduling, supervisory relationships, and opportunities for faculty collaboration. As the student participants in my study suggested, these important aspects of school organization can likewise enhance or limit teachers’ authentic practice in critical ways. In addition, and as other scholars have noted (e.g., Cusick, 1973; Cusick, Martin, & Palonsky, 1976), these factors may take on even greater importance for student and teacher behavior in traditional educational contexts, wherein norms, expectations, and roles may be more firmly entrenched and less conducive to authentic teaching and relating.

Teacher Retention

My findings also have implications for teacher retention. Recent research suggests that current calls for more and better teachers are not a reflection of teacher shortages, per se, but rather an issue of teacher *retention* due in part to low job satisfaction (Berryhill, Linney, &

Fromewick, 2009; Byrd-Blake, Afolayan, Hunt, Fabunmi, Pryor, & Leander, 2010; Santoro, 2011). As I shared in Chapters 2 and 6, current educational trends (e.g., toward high-stakes testing, outcomes-based teacher evaluation systems, continual analysis of student performance data, and even scripted curricula) increasingly encroach upon teachers' autonomy and influence (Apple, 1995; Cuban, 2004; Neimiec & Ryan, 2009)—and have also been linked to higher rates of teacher attrition and turnover (Lui, 2007; Hanusheck, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004). While these pressures reflect both current and historical constructions of teaching as selfless work (recall, for instance, the contrary ideals of the *objective, professional* teacher [e.g., Hargreaves, 2001; Shapiro, 2010] and the *caring, altruistic* teacher [e.g., Higgins, 2011]), my research supports the wisdom of Palmer's (2007) claim that, "[r]eform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations, restructuring schools, rewriting curricula, and revising texts if we continue to demean and dishearten the human resource called the teacher on whom so much depends" (p. 4).

Indeed, consistent with research suggesting that improved teaching stems from teachers' intrinsically-motivated beliefs and behaviors rather than external sanctions or controls (Niemic & Ryan, 2009), the concept of authentic teaching calls for autonomy-supportive policies, leadership, and curricula as supports for *both* students and teachers. In what seems a remarkable and important finding, the student participants in my research expressly named teachers' creative, personalized, and "self-ful" teaching (Higgins, 2011, p.2) as supports to their learning—and recognized, too, that, to do this, their best teachers often had to teach against the grain in traditional school environments. As Noddings (2013) similarly explained, current trends toward standardized learning and curricular sameness make it hard to recruit and retain exceptional teachers, for, as she said, "This is such an impoverished notion of teaching that one wonders why anyone with intellectual vitality would enter profession" (p. 125).

While my findings call for further research about teachers' needs, feelings, and opinions in relation to authentic teaching, it nonetheless seems fitting to wonder—given the organizational logic that task should drive structure (Riehl, 2009), and the clear preference my participants held for teaching that aligns with this model—how policies supportive of authentic teaching might influence teacher recruitment, job satisfaction, and retention in schools that serve populations similar to the participants in my research.

Renewal. Related, perhaps, to the larger issue of teacher retention is the question of sustainability—particularly for the type of authentic teaching described throughout my dissertation as a support for struggling or disaffected learners. As I shared above, seeing students, teaching with self, and relating authentically require tremendous commitments of energy and emotion—especially in our current educational climate—and, like any form of challenging, meaningful work, will likely demand periods of refilling and renewal (Drago-Severson, 2012; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013). As Drago-Severson (2012) explained, “We all need to continue to grow, learn, and refill in order to bring our best and truest selves—our hearts, minds, and souls—to the important work of supporting others” (p. 195).

Indeed, Reback, Rockoff, and Schwartz (2011) found that teachers who worked with the neediest student populations and taught subjects tested by high-stakes exams typically worked longer hours than similar teachers in higher-performing schools. Yet, while student participants did not explicitly name teacher renewal as an important part of authentic teaching, recent research suggests that a teacher's exhaustive work for others—even if well-intentioned—may ultimately impede his or her ability to foster positive classroom climates, caring relationships, and/or growth-enhancing contexts (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2011; Drago-

Severson, 2012; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013; MacDonald & Shirley, 2009).

Similarly, given the frequent but unintended consequences of traditional understandings of teacher quality and mounting accountability measures (Ravitch, 2010; Wheatley, 2005; Willis & Sandholtz, 2009), teachers' authentic practice could be constrained in ways that drain their energy and motivation for the work. As Berryhill, Linney, and Fromewick (2009) argued, for instance, teaching counter to one's own professional judgment in response to policies or mandates may ultimately lead to conflict, frustration, or even exhaustion on the part of teachers.

Conversely, then, policies supportive of authentic teaching may have the additional benefit of infusing teaching with more natural sustainability. As Hansen (1995) explained in his study of four teachers who, in their own ways, were "called" to teach, "The personal fulfillment they derive from teaching may be a direct consequence of the very fact that they do bring so much of themselves to bear while on the job" (p. 116). Creating opportunities, then, for teachers to bring themselves to the work and to find time, as well, for growing and replenishing *who they are* as the wellspring of their teaching may make an important difference for students and teachers alike.

Teacher Evaluation

The model for authentic teaching as described throughout my dissertation also has implications for the related issue of teacher evaluation. A hot-button and pervasive topic in the latest rounds of education reform—as at least 36 states have revised teacher evaluation laws in the last five years, and since many districts are now moving to performance-based teacher evaluation systems in advance of Race to the Top legislation (Shakman, Riordan, Sanchez, Cook, Fournier, & Brett, 2012)—teacher evaluation today often feels synonymous with external

control of professional standards and tightened accountability (Drago-Severson, forthcoming). While few would disagree with the importance of identifying effective and ineffective teachers and supporting improved student achievement, questions remain about what teacher evaluations are actually measuring—as well as the important aspects of quality teaching such measures may inadvertently leave out or de-prioritize (Kane & Staiger, 2012). Similarly, the developmental discussion in the sections above suggests the importance of *differentiating* feedback and evaluations in order to best support teacher growth—as the adults who fill these roles will likely have differing capacities for taking in and learning from others’ feedback (Drago-Severson, forthcoming).

Indeed, as I described above—and as participants in my research study also intuited—many teachers’ mounting stresses reflect the *what* and *how* of formal evaluation systems just as much as the inherent strain of caring deeply for diverse and often vulnerable groups of human beings. Yet, as we search for new solutions to old problems, and for ways to *re-form* the ethereal substance of our classrooms, might we not also consider, in our teacher assessments, how educators at all levels could help *trans-form* and actualize the best of what teachers already know and do? Importantly, my research suggests that many answers to questions about what makes a good teacher lie somewhere *within teachers themselves*—so the question becomes “How can we grow and support these capacities and qualities?” just as much as “How can we require and measure them?”

While emerging paradigms, like the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project, for example, seek to take into account multiple measures of teachers’ practice—such as student test scores, observations, student assessments, and the relational and intellectual climates of classrooms (Danielson, 2011; Grossman, 2009; Kane et al., 2013; Pianta, 2013)—more research

is needed to understand how, if at all, the authentic teaching paradigm could inform or enhance current teacher evaluation systems. Indeed, this seems like an important avenue for future investigation given the sharings of the nineteen student participants in my research—and the fact that their stories of *re-engagement* went much deeper than surface measures of academic success. Moreover, participants’ emphases on authentic teaching feel all the more compelling given their multifaceted parallels to decades of research and writing about person-centered, humanistic teaching that echo and honor education’s deep roots as a profoundly human endeavor (Buber, 1947; Hansen, 1995, 2001; Higgins, 2011; Greene, 1978; Moustakas, 1959; Palmer, 2007; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994).

Ultimately, the model for authentic teaching that I have presented in my dissertation provides a framework for thinking further about good teaching—and for maintaining a more open, evolving understanding of what it means to measure and evaluate teacher practice in the first place. Forging down this path—toward a more encompassing, holistic approach to assessing and supporting teachers—is of critical importance, for if we cannot conceive of it, we cannot do it. And, as the sharings of the nineteen student participants in my research suggest, measuring only those aspects of teaching that can be readily quantified or tabulated may miss the heart of it all.

Chapter Summary & Closing Thoughts

Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count;
everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.

– Albert Einstein

At the conclusion of their 2004 article (which, in many ways, helped to guide and frame my dissertation research), Cranton and Carusetta offered the following reflection:

Authenticity in teaching has been a relatively neglected area of study. It is more common for people to look for standardized principles of effective practice than it

is for them to turn inward and examine how it is that they as social human beings and individuals can develop their own way in the world of teaching. (p. 21)

While they shared this thought in relation to the higher education context, my research suggests that authenticity—as a powerful yet under-researched multidimensional phenomenon in the wider educational literature (Kreber et al., 2007)—may be of great value to constructions of education at all levels, and especially in service to students traditionally designated “at-risk.”

Accordingly, in this chapter, after revisiting my study’s purposes and courageous participants, I presented a reconceptualized model for authentic teaching in the alternative school context that brought together participants’ many important ideas and insights about good teachers and the vital work that they do. Moreover, I discussed how teachers’ internal capacities (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012; Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000) would likely influence their orientations toward and expressions of authenticity—and offered developmental suggestions for educational leadership and professional development that could help shape schools as more authentic sites of learning, teaching, and relating (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012). Additionally, I closed by considering the larger organizational and policy implications of my research for teacher retention and evaluation. While there are likely other important outgrowths and implications of this work (e.g., considering ideas about authenticity in light of K-12 teachers’ perceptions and experiences), I limited my discussion to the above-named issues, as they seemed most relevant to my research questions and findings.

In the end, then, this chapter and my research were really about the importance of who and what we *value* in education—about the inputs, outcomes, voices, ideas, and expertise that *matter* to practitioners, policymakers, and researchers alike. While it seems clear that, for the student participants in this study, authentic selfhood—for both students and teachers—sat at the

heart of their most helpful and meaningful learning experiences, it is also true that authentic teaching as they described it may be a goal rather than a prescription, and a process more than an accomplishment. As such, these participants may be pointing us toward the *hardest* and *highest* kinds of teaching—teaching that, as Hansen (2001) described, “highlights what people can become, not simply what people have been,...[that] invites people to participate in what they could be, not solely in what they are or in what others perceive or want them to be” (p. 134-135).

While such authentic teaching may take time, heart, and conscious effort, *it is no less than these students deserve*. It is also something that, promisingly, every teacher can aspire to in his or her own self. Ultimately, then—just as in life and learning—real school improvement may begin with the important and impactful work of a few dedicated individuals, who can lead us toward a greater good one step at a time.

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Appendix A: Protocol for Interview 1

Getting to Know Each Other & Exploring Good Teachers

Name of Interviewee: _____

School/Site: _____

Date: _____

Duration of Interview: _____

Welcome, Gratitude & Logistics

A. Appreciation & Overview

Thank you *very* much for volunteering to help with my research project, and for taking the time to talk with me today! Your participation is greatly appreciated and will help contribute new knowledge about good teachers. In other words what you share will be helpful to teachers, other students and researchers like me who want to learn what you think and how you feel about good teachers. Thank you also for returning the signed informed consent forms (from both you and your parent[s]/guardian[s]). Do you have any questions for me about any of that at this time? Or anything else?

In a few minutes, we're going to start the interview. It should take between 45 minutes and one hour. Does this feel ok to you right now? Please know that you are free to stop the interview at any time – and you don't have to answer any question that you don't want to, ok? Everything that you share with me is entirely up to you, and I completely trust and respect whatever you decide to share.

Before we begin, I wanted to say a little more about why I'm really interested in learning from you and why I'm really interested in this project. As I shared with you earlier, I used to be a teacher in alternative schools and I decided to go back to graduate school so I could learn more about what students like the ones I taught really wanted from their teachers. I think that what you share with me can help other students, teachers, principals, and people who make rules and policies about education do an even better job. Thank you again for volunteering to help with this.

B. Taping

In order to make sure that I can listen very carefully while we're talking, and so that I can go back and review what you've shared with me later, is it still ok with you if I record our conversation (audio only)? The tape recording will be transcribed – meaning that someone will type our words into a document – a transcript – so that I can have a print-out of our conversation – but no one other than me and the transcriber will have access to the tapes. The transcripts of

our interviews will also be kept confidential, and no one other than me and the people who are helping me with this research (like my teachers at school and other graduate students who are also working on research) will be allowed to see them. Also, I promise not to include any identifying information in these transcripts if I share them with others, so no one reading them will no that you were the person talking. Do you have any questions about this? Does this still feel ok?

C. Confidentiality

As a researcher, I will write about what you share with me to help people learn about what you and the other students in this study say about good teachers. However, when writing about your experiences, I will protect your confidentiality or privacy by replacing your real name with a pseudonym/alias (fake name you'd like to be called when I write about what you shared) *that you select*, and I will also disguise the name of your school. This way, readers will be able to learn about the insights and examples you've shared without knowing that you were the one that said them. Do you have any questions about this? Also, do you have any ideas for a pseudonym? We can pick one now, or at a later time in the study so you have more time to think about it.

Pseudonym: _____

D. Your Questions?

In a few minutes we will begin the interview. *Please know that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions we will talk about.* This is not a test. In fact, the goal is to understand *your* experiences in order to learn more about what you think about good teachers. Do you have any questions before we begin? About me or the study or anything else? If you have any questions at any time, please let me know, ok?

Student Background Questions & Prior Experiences

In order to get to know a little bit more about you, we're going to begin with some background questions, ok? Here we go...

1. What grade are you in right now?
2. And how old are you?
3. How long have you been at this school?
4. Can you please tell me a little bit about why you decided to enroll here?
5. What were your experiences in school like *before* you came to _____ (alternative school name)?
 - 5a. What would you say were one or two of your biggest challenges in your old school? What made things difficult for you there, at your old school, or kept you from doing your best?

[Probes: Examples of when you became aware of this? What was that like for you? Stories? Thinking at the time? Feelings? Then? Now?]

5b. Who do you think played a role in this challenge or set of challenges? How so?

[Probes: Role of teachers? Other students? Other adults? Example/Stories? Context? Age? Grade? What was that like for you?]

6. How, if at all, has being in this school helped you with these challenges? In general?

[Probes: Example/Stories?]

6a. What role, if any, have teachers played in helping you?

[Probes: Example/Stories?]

6b. Others?

[Probes: Example/Stories?]

Good Teachers – Descriptions & Experiences

*As you know, I'm really interested in learning more about how you understand what it means to be or what characteristics or qualities you think make for good teachers, as **you** understand and experience them. These can be teachers here at _____ (the alternative school) or from anytime in your life. For these questions, I'm going to ask you to look back on all of your experiences as a student and describe someone—a teacher—that stands out to you as a good teacher. It could even be someone who is your teacher right now. Do you have at least one example that comes to mind?*

IF YES: (repeat questions as needed for additional examples)

7. That's great! Can you tell me a little bit about this teacher? What was his/her name? When did you have this teacher? What did he/she teach?

8. What was it about _____ (teacher) that makes/made him or her a good teacher, in your opinion?

[Probes: Ask student to define/describe abstract words if they come up, Feelings/thinking?]

8a. Can you please share a specific example of a time when you felt this teacher was good?

[Probes: Specific Actions, thinking/feeling?]

9. What, if anything, do you think makes/made this teacher *different* than other teachers, from your perspective?

9b. Why do you think other teachers do/do not do this?

IF NO:

7. I am so sorry to learn this. Can you please help me understand why you've answered this way, and also how this makes you feel?

7a. Can you think of another adult – either in or out of school – that has been particularly helpful to you? (*If yes, adapt questions from above series to fit new role; if no, continue below*).

8. What, from your perspective, *would* make a teacher good?

[Probes: define concepts / terms, why?]

8a. Can you please give me a specific example of what this might look like?

[Probes: Example/Stories?]

8b. Feel like?

[Probes: Example/Stories?]

9. In what ways, then, do you think a good teacher be *different* than other teachers?

[Probes: Example/Stories?]

9a. Why do you think teachers do/do not do this?

Wrap-Up, Gratitude & Previews of Next Steps

I want to thank you very much for all that you have so generously shared with me today. I really appreciate your time, your trust and your willingness to think so carefully about these important questions. Please know that what you shared will be a big contribution to this research. I have just a few more questions before we wrap up, and I also want to circle back to what will come next in the research project, ok?

10. First, I'm wondering if there's anything that you feel is important to share about good teachers that I haven't already asked you about? Is there anything you'd like to add to any of the questions I asked for your help with about this?

11. Next, could you please help me understand more about why you volunteered to participate in this research?
12. Finally, I want to provide you with another chance to ask any questions you might have about me, this study, or anything else that I could help you with. Is there anything you wanted to ask about right now? Or anything you would like to know about this project?

Well, that brings us to the end of our interview! Soon, I'll follow up with you about scheduling a second interview, in which we can take an even closer look at some of the important ideas you shared today. I'll also be here at _____ (alternative school) according to my regular schedule, so I'll look forward to seeing you around and in classes as usual. Thank you so much for your really great help today!

Appendix B: Protocol for Interview 2

Learning More About What You Think and Feel About Good Teachers

Name of Interviewee: _____

School/Site: _____

Date: _____

Duration of Interview: _____

Welcome, Gratitude & Logistics

A. Appreciation & Overview

Thank you once again for helping with my research project, and for making more time to talk with me today. I am truly grateful! During this interview, we'll have a chance to review some of the big ideas you shared last time to make sure that I understand everything clearly – and also to see if you have anything you'd like to add or change. After that, we'll learn even more about your thinking and feeling about good teachers by approaching the topic from four new angles (which I'll explain more about shortly). Like last time, I expect that this interview will last about 45 minutes to an hour. Please know that you don't have to answer any question that you don't want to, ok? As always, I'm happy to answer any questions you might have now or at anytime during the interview. Is there anything you want to ask about right now? Anything you've thought about since last time and now want to ask?

B. Taping

I also want to ask for your permission again to tape record this interview. Just like last time, the recording will be transcribed so that I can have a print-out of our conversation – but no one other than me and the transcriber will have access to the tapes. The transcripts of our interviews will also be kept confidential/private, and no one other than me and the people who are helping me with this research (like my teachers at school and other graduate students who are also working on research) will be allowed to see them. Also, I promise not to include any identifying information in these transcripts if I share them, so no one reading them will know that you were the person talking. Do you have any questions about this? Does this still feel ok?

C. Confidentiality

As we discussed last time, I will write about what you share with me to help people learn about what you and the other students in this study say about good teachers, but I will remove all of your identifying information (for example, your real name and your school's name) from my writing so that no one will be able to tell which ideas you shared and which ideas others shared. Do you have any questions about this?

Thank you very much for picking a pseudonym last time in order to protect the confidentiality and privacy of what you share with me. Does _____ (selected pseudonym) still feel like a good choice to you?

D. Your Questions?

In a few minutes we will begin the interview. *Please know that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions we will talk about.* This is not a test. In fact, the goal is to understand *your* experiences in order to learn more about good teachers. Do you have any questions before we begin? About me or the study or anything else? If you have any questions at any time, please let me know, ok?

Check-In Around Interview #1

Thank you very much for all that you shared in our last interview. I really appreciate your trust and your honesty. I've been thinking a lot about your important experiences and what you shared with me, and I wanted to make sure that I'm making sense of everything you told me in the right way. To help make sure that I most accurately understand your thinking, feeling and experiences, I'm going to share a quick summary of what I think I learned from you last time. Can you please let me know if this sounds correct – or if there's anything you'd me to adjust?

1. Summary of big themes / ideas from Interview 1.
2. Since you've also had some time to think about these ideas since we spoke last, is there anything you would like to add, adjust or change at this time?

Learning More About What You Think and Feel About Good Teachers

For this next part of the interview, we are going to approach the question of what makes a good teacher from a number of different angles. The series of questions that follows is based on a model that helps people to think about very complex ideas (like what makes a good teacher) in a number of key steps. In case you're curious, this framework is called the ORID framework (which stands for "Objective-Reflective-Interpretive-Decisional"), and has been used around the world to help many people explore many different kinds of questions.

*In line with this approach, we're first going to think about teachers in an objective way – or by describing what you could **see** and **hear** as an observer watching a teacher in action. You could also think of this as "thinking like a **reporter**" who is taking very detailed notes so that the report paints an accurate picture of events. Does this make sense to you? Any questions?*

*Next, I'll ask you to think carefully about how good teachers make you **feel** when you're with them or when you're working together. You could think of this reflective approach as "thinking like an **artist or poet**." What I mean by this is using words, imagery, and associations to capture the feeling of an experience, and what it means to you.*

*Then, I'll ask you to share your interpretation of **what matters most to you** about good teachers. Kind of like a **lawyer** making a closing argument that ties together all that's come before, these*

questions will help us look for **patterns** (in the “evidence” of your ideas) about what feels most helpful, supportive and important to you in terms of good teachers. Does this make sense to you?

Finally, with the decisional questions that conclude this part of the interview, you’ll get a chance to offer **advice and suggestions** about what teachers and schools could do to support you and your learning even better...kind of like a **judge or principal** making a decision.

Before we get started with this, do you have any questions?

Objective Questions: Thinking Like A Reporter

Ok, so we’re about to start the first part – thinking like a reporter. For these questions, the focus is on what you can remember **seeing and hearing** – things you could **observe**, ok? Do you have any questions before we start?

3. In our first interview, you shared a lot about _____ (good teacher; either real or hypothetical). Thinking like a reporter, please try to call to mind a time that you were with _____ (this teacher) that really stands out in your memory. It could be something like a lesson that went really well or any other kind of interaction. I’m going to give you a few minutes to think of an example, and then we’ll talk more, ok?

Once student picks a time...

(Note: If student did not identify a good teacher in Interview 1, these questions could be framed as “ideal” hypotheticals. In other words, how would the student want an interaction to go and why?)

- 3a. Please tell me about this time. What happened? Where and when was this? Who else was with you? Can you please describe the setting for this event?
- 3b. Can you remember anything that _____ (the teacher) said or did at this time that feels particularly important? What details can you describe?

[Probes: specific incident or story; details]

- 3c. Do you remember how, if at all, this was helpful to you? Why?
4. Are there any other examples with this teacher or others that feel important to share here? (Same follow ups as above).

Reflective Questions: Thinking Like an Artist or Poet

Ok, so for the next few questions, we’re going to switch into artist or poet mode, and think about how we can describe our feelings and beliefs through words, associations and imagery.

5. Thinking back to your examples and to good teachers more generally, how do good teachers *make you feel*?

[Probes: specifics? Meanings of words/phrases they use? For instance, “cared about me,” “helped me”]

- 5a. What do they do that makes you feel this way? In other words, how can you *tell* they are good teachers?
- 5b. What other people, things or experiences – either in or out of school – (if any) have made you feel this way too?
- 5c. Since we’re thinking like poets here, and since I used to be an English teacher, I’m going to ask you next to talk in similes, ok? Similes, as you know, are comparisons using “like” or “as.” With that in mind, how would you complete this sentence and why? “Good teachers are *like* _____.” Please take a few minutes to write down any thoughts that come to mind, ok? (Then discuss).

[Probes: stories / examples as needed].

6. How do you think this is different than what it feels like to work with a not-so-good teacher (or even a bad teacher), from your perspective?

[Probes: Examples/stories? Specifics? Meaning of words/phrases?]

Interpretive Questions: Pulling Together Ideas Like a Lawyer

Next I’ll ask you to think like a lawyer and pull together some big and important ideas about good teaching to help shine a light on what you think really matters most about good teachers, ok?

7. In light of all that you’ve already shared (and anything that you haven’t), what feels most important to you about what makes a good teacher?
 - 7a. About what makes someone *not* a great teacher?
8. To put this another way, please imagine all the teachers you’ve ever had lined up side-by-side in a giant room. Now, imagine your best teachers taking ten steps forward, your least favorite teachers taking ten steps backwards, and everyone else just staying put in the middle. What do all the teachers at the front of the room have in common? What about those towards the back? The middle?
9. How, if at all, do you think these patterns relate to what a teacher teaches (i.e., subject)? In other words, does what makes someone a good (or not good) teacher change depending upon the subject they teach?
10. What happens for you when you are able to work with good teachers?
 - 10a. When you are not?

10 b. Do your feelings about your teachers make a difference in your learning? In other words, how, if at all, does having a good teacher (or not) influence how well you do in school?

10c. How, if at all, do you think your teachers could better support you and your learning right now?

[Probes: Examples, Stories, Specifics?]

Decisional Thinking: You as Judge or Principal

Next, I'd like to invite you to think a little more about how your ideas about good teachers could inform important decisions – and give you a chance to think like a principal or a judge.

11. If you had an opportunity to teach teachers about what it takes to be good at this job, what would you want them to learn? Why? How do you think that would help you? Other students?

12. If you were in charge of hiring new teachers for your school, what would you look for (qualities, characteristics)? What advice would you give to new teachers about teaching here?

12a. Would you give this same advice to teachers in more traditional environments? Why or why not?

12 b. Do you think a good teacher for you would be a good teacher for others? Why or why not?

Wrap-Up, Gratitude & Previews of Next Steps

I want to thank you very much for all that you have so generously shared with me today and last time we were together. I really appreciate your time, your trust and your willingness to think so carefully about these important questions. Please know that what you shared will be a big contribution to this research and to helping others who also want to do their best for students. I have just a few more questions before we wrap up, and I also want to circle back to what will come next in my research project, ok?

13. First, I'm wondering if there's anything that you feel is important to share about teachers that I haven't asked you about today or in our last interview?

14. Finally, like last time, I want to provide you with some time to ask any questions you might still have about me, this project, or anything else that I could help you with. Is there anything you would like to ask about right now?

Well, that brings us to the end of our second interview! Thank you so much! Soon, I'll follow up with you about scheduling a time to participate in a focus group, which is a like a group-interview I'll hold with you and a few other students from _____ (alternative school – same site) to share some of what I've learned from all of you so far – and to discuss, debate, expand and/or explore these ideas together. Do you have any questions about this? I'll be here according to my usual schedule, so please feel free to reach out with questions at any time, and I'll look forward to seeing you around school and in classes as we approach the next step of our study! Thank you once again so very much for your great help today!

Appendix C: Focus Group Protocol
Reflecting, Refining and Expanding Upon Interview Learnings

Participants: _____
(Also note grade level, _____
time enrolled) _____

School/Site: _____

Date: _____

Duration: _____

Welcome, Gratitude & Logistics

A. Appreciation & Overview

Thank you all for being here today and for your continued contributions to this research project. I am truly grateful to and for each of you. Today, we'll be talking together about some of the big ideas about good teachers that you have taught me about in our interviews, and you'll have a chance to think about, refine and expand these ideas both privately and as a group. One big goal for today, then, is to learn what you think about what I've learned so far from you and with your great help. Another goal is to discover what else – if anything – you think we can add to these ideas. Does this make sense? Does anyone have any questions about this? Also, just like our interviews, this focus group will probably last about an hour, and you should feel free to partake of refreshments (provided) or ask questions of each other and me at any time, ok? Thank you so much for being here today and for all of your help!

B. Taping

Just like during our interviews, I'm asking for your permission to tape record our conversation. Also like last time, the tape recording will be transcribed so that I can have a print-out of our conversation – but no one other than me and the transcriber will have access to the tapes. The transcripts of our interviews will also be kept confidential and private, and no one other than me and the people who are helping me with this research (like my teachers at school and other graduate students who are helping with my research) will be allowed to see them. Also, I promise not to include any identifying information in these transcripts if I share them with others, so no one reading them will be able to identify which contributions today are yours. Do you have any questions about this? Does this still feel ok to each of you?

C. Confidentiality

As we have discussed before, I will write about what you share with me to help people learn about what you and the other students in this project say about good teachers, but, in my writings, I will use the great pseudonyms that you have picked (instead of your real names) and change the name of your school so that no one will be able to tell which ideas you shared and which ideas others shared. Do you have any questions about this?

I'll also have to ask for your help today protecting the confidentiality of what we talk about today, since we'll be discussing these ideas together. While I won't be asking you to share any personal information or stories today, it's still important that we come to some agreement about confidentiality since we'll all be talking together (which is a different from our interviews, when I could guarantee that no one else would know which ideas and stories you shared). Does it feel ok if we all agree to keep what other people share during this focus group private? In other words, can we please agree not to talk about what other people in the group say? How does this feel to you? Do you have any questions or concerns?

D. Your Questions?

In a few minutes we will officially start the focus group. *Please know that, just as in our interviews, there are no right or wrong answers to the questions we will talk about.* This is not a test, and I am not looking for you to answer questions in any particular way. I consider you to be experts on your own experiences. In fact, my goal is to understand *your* perspectives and experiences in order to learn as much as possible from you about good teachers. Do you have any questions before we begin? About me or the study or anything else? If you have any questions at any time, please let me know! Also, please know that you don't have to answer any question that you don't want to, and you should participate today only as much as you are comfortable. To help you keep track of your ideas, I'm also going to pass out a note-taking sheet that lines up with some of the big topics we're going to talk about.

Categories for Discussion

The topics that we will talk about today come from ideas that you have each shared with me in interviews. We're going to talk about each of these topics one-by-one, but please feel free to go back to a topic at any time if you think of something new, ok? For each topic, I'm going to share some of the biggest learnings from you, and then give you a few moments to write or think privately about how these sound. Then we'll talk about them together. Do you have any questions about this?

Focus group topics will depend largely upon my interview findings, but based on my research questions, topics may include the following.

For each topic, I will present big ideas ("I've learned A, B, C.... Does this align with what you think now?"), and then invite students to think or write privately about their responses before discussing the topic as a group.

1. Personal qualities/characteristics of good teachers.

2. How good teachers make students feel.
3. What good teachers do.
4. What good teachers don't do.
5. Contrast with other teachers.
6. Important implications/takeaways for teachers.
7. Do your feelings about your teachers make a difference in your learning? In other words, how, if at all, does having a good teacher (or not) influence how well you do in school?

Wrap-Up, Gratitude & Previews of Next Steps

I want to thank you very much for all that you have so generously shared with me today. I really appreciate your time, your trust and your willingness to think so carefully about these important questions. I've learned so much from you all! Please know that what you shared will be a big contribution to this research project! I have just a few more questions before we wrap up.

8. First, I'm wondering if there's anything that you feel is important to share about good teachers or anything else that I haven't asked you about today or in our past interviews?
9. Finally, like other times, I want to provide you with an opportunity to ask any questions you might still have about me, this research project, or anything else that I could help you with. Is there anything you would like to ask about right now?

Well, that brings us to the end of our focus group! Thank you once again so very much for your great help today!

Appendix D: Thematic Notes and Questions for Focus Group

NARRATIVE FOR FOCUS GROUP:

- *Shared many important insights*
- *Each one of you offered something different and unique – Thank you!*
- *Goal of today is twofold*
 - 1) *Listen to hear your unique voice and perspective. Are your ideas represented?*
 - 2) *Look between and across different ideas to find patterns and themes. Pulling it all together, learn from what other people shared.*

As you know, my focus is on good teaching from your perspective, given your experiences as students in alternative high schools (have had many kinds of teachers).

CONFIDENTIALITY REMINDER: Say only what's comfortable, group context

1) Good teachers – hard to put into words

- “undefinable X-factor”
- you can “just tell”
- they seemingly “just know” what to do to help
- body language, good or bad – “vibe” they give off
- descriptive words like nice, warm, trustworthy, supportive, knowledgeable, enthusiastic
- interesting, too, diversity of styles (very hands-on, very traditional, very laid back, very straightforward / clear).

QUESTION: How do you make sense of this diversity?

2) Really “Seeing” and Helping Student

- Many of you spoke about how good teachers are able to see you for who you really are – and who you could and want to be.
- Seeing hope, potential, something positive (when maybe you were holding yourself back on purpose, putting up a front or disguise to feel safer, or just feeling unnoticed or anonymous)
- Also seeing where you're coming from, seeing challenges, problems, pains and feelings

QUESTION: How important is it to you to feel *seen* in this way by your teachers?

Some positive teacher qualities that you mentioned that seem (to me) to be related to this idea:

- Relate lessons to student interests
- Look past first impressions
- Care beyond school (whole person, not just academics)
- Put in time beyond the minimum

- Flexibility – fairness v. “fairness”

Some negative teacher qualities that you described that seem to be pitfalls in this area:

- Rule bound
- Curriculum bound
- Power / Control
- In it for the wrong reasons (money, etc.), or getting burnt out / frustrated

QUESTION: Reactions to these groupings? Any other ideas? Insights? Missing anything?

QUESTION: What happens for you when you are supported in this way? How, if at all, is this important or special?

3) Teacher Bringing Self Into Work

- Many of you also talked about good teachers who “bring themselves into the work,” or “teach as who they are” – kind of like “real people or human beings.”
- See their personalities, quirks, “be themselves” – “love in different ways”

QUESTION: For those of you who talked about this, and for those of you thinking about it now, does this still feel important? Related to why good teachers are different?

Some positive teacher qualities that you shared that (to me) seem to be related to this idea:

- Passion / interest in subject
- Having some control over what or how they are teaching
- Showing a sense of humor
- Being in it for the right reasons, and staying true to those

Some negative characteristics / challenges that you mentioned that relate to teachers teaching in this way:

- Some want to be good teachers, but “trapped” by pressures of testing, regulations, bureaucracy, budget, hierarchical structure of school, competition, evaluation
 - As one student said, “can’t connect as well, can’t step forward”
 - Many students are grade focused as well, so pressure coming from both ends
- Size and time get in the way, too.
- Curriculum is very standardized – everyone the same
- Try to be like other teachers or teachers they’ve had in the past

Others maybe hold back on purpose?

- Fear of being “unprofessional”
- Keep a wall or barrier up – differentiate themselves from students
- “Put on a face” to be / feel superior
- Feel like “big decorations that talk”
- Related to those teachers who care more about curriculum, rules, or power?

QUESTION: Reactions to these ideas?

QUESTION: Do you agree that some teachers want to hold back? Why do you think they do this? What do you think it means to be “professional”?

QUESTION: Is there a way for teachers who want to be “more like themselves” to overcome some of these obstacles? Anything else getting in the way?

4) Student–Teacher Relationships: Balance

Some of you talked about the importance of balance, of not “swinging to extremes” in teaching and in relationships with students

- For example, we’ve talked about teachers that care too much about the curriculum and/or their own interests and not enough about the students
- Some of you have even talked about teachers whose personal lives and needs get in the way.
- You might also imagine, as some of you did, teachers who “try too hard” to “get on the same level as students.” Kind of like putting on a “fake accent when you visit another country.”
- In all of these examples, and in many other things you shared, the idea came out that there’s a certain line that shouldn’t be crossed or a balancing act that teachers need to perform to do their jobs well.

QUESTION: Does this still ring true? How does this sound, hearing it now, and do you have any other thoughts about these ideas? What is this “line”?

Perhaps related to this was the idea of the teacher’s responsibility.

- For example, some of you thought it was the teacher’s responsibility to care *first*, or to make that first step. “Stick head out of water” and model risk taking.

QUESTION: What do you think about this?

A number of you also talked about the importance of teachers caring about *all* students, not just you or a select group in the class.

QUESTION: What does the way a teacher interacts with others tell you about what kind of teacher they are? Is this something you think about or look out for?

A few of you also described that teachers kind of fell into “their own category”—meaning that the relationships you had with them weren’t quite like any others in your lives.

QUESTION: Now that you’ve had more time to think about it, is there anything or anyone else you feel a good teacher could compare to? What do you feel about this idea of the student-teacher relationship being very distinct?

5) Alternative School Context

You all shared many amazing stories about what it means to you to be in an alternative school, how it has helped you, and how – for a lot of you – getting the word out about what really happens here was a big part of why you volunteered to help with this project. Thank you again!

Seems like a good place to close, by reflecting on some of the big themes you've shared about alternative schools, and give you a chance to add anything that feels important, ok?

Positives

- Small Size
- Students and Peers, connect to amazing, talented people you might not have thought you had much in common with
- “Like a Family” (mothers, fathers, uncles, friends – “we fight, but there’s no hatred”)
- The Whole Thing Together—not just one teacher

Negatives

- Less Academic Options
- Reputation

QUESTION: Anything else you want to share / reflect on regarding your experiences in alternative schools, and what others should know, good or bad?

THANK YOU!

ANY OTHER QUESTIONS, ABOUT ANYTHING AT ALL?

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form For Parents/Guardians & Participants' Rights Form

TEACHERS COLLEGE
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

525 West 120th Street
New York, NY 10027
212-678-3000
www.tc.edu

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS / GUARDIANS

Principal Investigator:

Jessica Blum-DeStefano

Research Title:

Reconsidering What Makes a Good Teacher: Learning from Alternative High School Students' Perspectives and Experiences

Invitation, Request for Permission (Informed Consent) and Overview of Research Project

Dear Parent,

I am a doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University, and I am working on a research project for my Ph.D. with students at your child's school. With your permission, I would like to talk with your son/daughter to learn about his/her experiences with good teachers. Doing so will help me learn more about what feels most helpful to students in alternative high schools. I am deeply interested in what students have to say because I care about them and their teachers. In fact, before returning to graduate school, I was an English teacher and Assistant Director in alternative schools for nine years. I also know that learning from students can help other teachers, principals, and educators do their work even better.

Below, I provide details of what I am hoping to learn and how your son/daughter can help. Please know I am here to answer your questions. If you would like to discuss this study further, please email me anytime at jesscblum@yahoo.com or contact your child's school so we can set up an appointment that fits your schedule. Thank you very much for your thoughtful consideration of this invitation. I really appreciate your time and care.

This study is important because so little is known about what students in alternative high schools find most important about their teachers. Your son's/daughter's participation would bring a new and very important perspective to this question. Please know that his/her participation is entirely voluntary. In other words, there is no penalty for not volunteering, and he/she could withdraw at any time.

Participation in this study involves two individual interviews and one focus group (group

interview with 3-6 other students) conducted over a four-month period. The interviews and focus groups will each last about an hour and will take place at school during the school day. I have arranged to visit the school weekly throughout the study to get to know the teachers and students – and to let them get to know me in return. With your permission, I will record the interviews and focus group (audio only) so that I can carefully reflect on what I learn. Transcripts of these conversations will be kept in a locked box at my home office to ensure the privacy (confidentiality) of all participants. Digital audio files will also be secured on a password-protected computer.

Risks and Benefits:

I will share findings from this research project in writings and reports, including my dissertation and publications after it, but I will remove all of your son's/daughter's identifying information (i.e., his/her real name) when I write about this study in order to ensure the privacy (confidentiality) of all participants. As such, there is minimal risk involved with participating in this project, although student volunteers may miss up to 3 hours of class time over a four-month period in order to participate in the interviews and the focus group. Please know, however, that should your son/daughter need to miss class in order to participate, I will consult with teachers to make sure he/she has the opportunity to make up missed work.

There is no penalty or consequence for not participating in this study, and your child's participation in this project is completely voluntary (which means she/he can withdraw at any time, for any reason). While students will receive no direct benefits for participating (for example, they will not receive extra credit for their classes), there may be some indirect benefits associated with this study, including the opportunity to contribute new knowledge about good teachers and alternative school programs that can help other students and educators. I hope you might agree and give your consent. If, for any reason, you decide not to allow your son/daughter to participate, I will respect your decision. Thank you very much for your careful consideration.

Confidentiality & Data Storage:

Your son/daughter will not be personally identified in any report or publication resulting from this research. He/She will pick a pseudonym to disguise his/her name. The school will be given a pseudonym as well. Any learnings shared will be presented with these pseudonyms.

All documents in digital and paper form will be kept on my password-protected computer or in a locked box in my home office to which only I have access. All forms of personal identification will be erased and eliminated. I will keep notes and transcripts for a period of 7 years for post-dissertation research and so I can share learnings in my writing.

NOTE: While I can guarantee the confidentiality of information shared during individual interviews, other student volunteers will be able to hear what your son/daughter shares during focus groups. However, I will remind all students of the importance of protecting privacy (confidentiality) at the beginning of each focus group, and students will not be asked to share private or personal experiences during this session.

Time Involvement:

This study will take a total of approximately 3 hours of your son's/daughter's time over the

course of about four months (October through January). The 3 hours will involve two hour-long private interviews with me and one hour-long focus group – all conducted during school hours at his/her school. I will also be conducting weekly visits/observations at the school throughout the study so that I can get to know your son/daughter and the other students and teachers.

Compensation:

Participation in this study is voluntary, and no payment will be provided. However, I deeply appreciate your son's/daughter's willingness to add to the body of knowledge about good teachers by sharing his/her important perspective, and I will give your son/daughter a gift certificate to Barnes and Noble in the amount of \$15 as an expression of my gratitude. In addition, I will offer a workshop based on the biggest learnings from this study to the teachers and administrators at your child's school.

How The Results Will Be Used:

I will use learnings from this work for my doctoral dissertation. In addition, I plan to present what I learn from your son or daughter at conferences and meetings, publish learnings in journals, articles, books, or other writings, and/or use the information for educational purposes in order to help schools, teachers, and educators concerned with improving conditions for students in alternative schools and other settings. In all of these places, I will protect your son's/daughter's confidentiality, and he/she will not be directly identified as a research participant (as discussed in the section about "Confidentiality").

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PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS FORM

Principal Investigator:

Jessica Blum-DeStefano

Research Title:

Reconsidering What Makes a Good Teacher: Learning from Alternative High School Students' Perspectives and Experiences

- I have read and discussed this Assent Form with the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures regarding this study.
- My participation in this research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at her professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to participate, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research project that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- If at any time I have any questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the investigator, who will answer my questions. I can also email her at jesscblum@yahoo.com. Her faculty advisor, Dr. Ellie Drago-Severson, at Teachers College, Columbia University, and can be reached at (212) 678-4163.
- If at any time I have comments, or concerns regarding the conduct of the research or questions about my rights as a research subject, I should contact the Teachers College, Columbia University Institutional Review Board/IRB. The phone number for the IRB is (212) 678-4105. Or, I can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY, 10027, Box 151.
- I should receive a copy of the Research Description and this Participant's Rights document.

- Digital audio taping is part of this research (please check one):
I () consent to be audio taped.
I () do NOT consent to be audio taped.
- Only the principal investigator, her faculty advisors and fellow graduate students assisting with data analysis will review the written and audio taped materials.
- My signature means that I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____

Guardian's Signature (consent): _____ Date: _____

Name: _____

Appendix F: Research Description and Assent Form for Students

TEACHERS COLLEGE
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525 West 120th Street
New York, NY 10027
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RESEARCH DESCRIPTION FOR STUDENTS

Principal Investigator:

Jessica Blum-DeStefano

Research Title:

Reconsidering What Makes a Good Teacher: Learning from Alternative High School Students' Perspectives and Experiences

Invitation, Request for Permission (Assent) and Overview of Research Project

Dear Student,

I am a doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University, and I am working on a research project for my Ph.D. with students at your school. I am asking for your help as a volunteer because I would love to learn about what feels most important to *you* about your teachers. Before going back to graduate school, I worked as an English teacher and an Assistant Director in alternative schools for nine years. I would love to learn what you and other students can teach me about what it means to be a good teacher. I thank you very much for your consideration of my invitation. I really care about what you have to say and I would love to learn from you.

This study is important because so little is known about what students in alternative high schools find most important about their teachers. Your participation would bring a new and very important perspective to this question. Please know that your participation is entirely voluntary. In other words, there is no penalty for not volunteering, and you can withdraw at any time.

If you volunteer, participating in this study will involve two private interviews (between you and me) and one focus group interview. A focus group interview is a conversation with a small group of students and me. All of this would happen over a four-month period. The interviews and focus groups will each last about an hour and will take place at your school during the school day. I will also be visiting your school weekly during this time to observe, learn, and get to know you, the teachers and the other students – and to let you get to know me in return. With your permission, I will tape-record the private interviews and the focus group so that I can carefully think about what you share with me. Transcripts of these conversations will be kept in

a locked box at my home office to ensure your privacy (confidentiality). Digital audio files will also be secured on a password-protected computer.

Risks and Benefits:

I will share what I learn from this research project in writings and reports, including my dissertation, but I will remove all of your identifying information (e.g., your real name, the name of your school) when I write about what I've learned in order to ensure the privacy (confidentiality) of all participants. As such, there is minimal risk involved with participating in this project, although you may miss up to 3 hours of class time over a four-month period in order to participate in the interviews and the focus group. Please know, however, that I will work with the teachers to assure a good time for these conversations.

There is no penalty or consequence for not participating in this study, and your participation in this project is completely voluntary (which means that you can withdraw at any time, for any reason). While you will receive no direct benefits for participating (for example, you will not receive extra credit for classes), there may be some indirect benefits associated with this study, including the opportunity to contribute new knowledge about good teachers that can help other students and educators. I hope you might agree and decide to participate. If, for any reason, you would prefer not to, I will respect your decision. Thank you very much for your careful consideration.

Confidentiality & Data Storage:

You will NOT be personally identified (I will not use your real name) in any report or publication resulting from this research. You will be invited to pick a pseudonym to disguise your name. Your school will be given a pseudonym as well.

All documents in digital and paper form will be kept on my password-protected computer or in a locked box in my home office to which only I will have access. All forms of personal identification will be erased and eliminated. I will keep tapes and transcripts for a period of 7 years after this project so that I can share learnings in my writing and for post-dissertation research.

NOTE: While I can guarantee the confidentiality of information shared during individual interviews, other student volunteers will be able to hear what you say during focus groups. However, I will remind everyone of the importance of protecting privacy (confidentiality) at the beginning of each focus group, and you will not be asked to share private or personal experiences during this session.

Time Involvement:

This study will take a total of approximately 3 hours of your time over the course of about four months (October through January). The 3 hours will involve two hour-long private interviews and one hour-long focus group – all conducted at school. I will also be visiting your school weekly throughout the study so I can get to know you and the other students and teachers.

Compensation:

Participation in this study is voluntary, and no payment will be provided. However, I deeply appreciate your willingness to add to the body of knowledge about good teachers, and I will give you a gift certificate to Barnes and Noble in the amount of \$15 as an expression of my gratitude. In addition, I will offer a workshop based on the biggest learnings from this study to your teachers and administrators.

How The Results Will Be Used:

I will use the results of the study for my doctoral dissertation. In addition, I plan and hope to present what I learn from you at conferences and meetings, publish findings in journals, articles, or scholarly writings, and/or use the information for educational purposes in order to help schools, teachers, and educators concerned with improving conditions for students in alternative schools and other settings. In these places, I will protect your privacy and confidentiality, and you will not be directly identified as a participant in my research (as discussed in the section about “Confidentiality”).

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ASSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS

Principal Investigator:

Jessica Blum-DeStefano

Research Title:

Reconsidering What Makes a Good Teacher: Learning from Alternative High School Students' Perspectives and Experiences

I _____ (name) agree to participate in the study entitled, "Reconsidering What Makes a Good Teacher: Learning from Alternative High School Students' Perspectives and Experiences." The purpose and nature of the study has been fully explained to me by Jessica Blum-DeStefano. I understand what is being asked of me, and should I have any questions, I know that I can contact Jessica Blum-DeStefano at any time. I also understand that I can quit the study any time I want to.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

INVESTIGATOR'S VERIFICATION OF EXPLANATION

I certify that I have carefully explained the purpose and nature of this research to

_____ (participant's name) in age-appropriate language. He/She has had the opportunity to discuss it with me in detail. I have answered all his/her questions and he/she provided the affirmative agreement (i.e., assent) to participate in this research.

Investigator's Signature: _____

Date: _____