

2016

Negotiating Identity and Constructing Masculinities: A Narrative Case Study of Men in Early Childhood Education

Matthew C. Luginbill

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**NEGOTIATING IDENTITY AND CONSTRUCTING MASCULINITIES:
A NARRATIVE CASE STUDY OF MEN IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

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June 2016

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June 7, 2016

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

You did it! You're done! You made it! You're through! OH, WHAT A GREAT MOMENT! Now what will you do? (Boynton, 2001)

This research was made possible because of support and guidance from many people. Dr. Volk- Thank you for your eagle eye with grammar, your prompt feedback, your gentle way of sharing how to improve this study, and your willingness to lead it heading into retirement.

Dr. Galletta- Thank you for believing in this topic, guiding me through the methodology design, investing your valuable time and energy, and leaving space for me connect the dots on my own.

Dr. Harper- Thank you for sharing words of wisdom at the beginning of every class, advising me when I was searching for a topic, and making me feel like I belonged in this program.

Dr. Hatch- Thank you for dedicating your attention to this topic and for opening my eyes to all the possibilities with policy.

Dr. Wheatley- Thank you for reminding me what really matters in early childhood education by sharing your “progressive, whole-child, big-picture perspective”.

Thank you Frank, Jerry, and George for sharing your experiences in early childhood education.

Thank you to my fellow Cohort XXVI members (especially my critical qualitative friends).

Thank you to my parents for always listening to me, praying for me, and believing in me.

Lastly, a special thank you to my wife Alicia Jane (A.J.) and our daughter Burkleigh Elizabeth. This would not have been possible without your love, understanding, and honesty.

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ABSTRACT

Men teachers are not present in early childhood classrooms for many reasons, despite recruitment efforts. Many men who do choose to follow this feminized career path find themselves positioned as tokens and often quickly leave for administration. Informed by a three-dimensional narrative inquiry approach this research utilized identity and masculinities paradigms to investigate the experiences of veteran men teaching young children. A series of four interviews was used to explore and describe the individual professional life history of participants. The narratives of Frank, Jerry, and George provide a deeper understanding of how men negotiate identity and construct masculinities over time in early childhood education. Findings suggest a critical mass of men teachers can lead to their acceptance in early childhood education while augmenting the male privilege they receive. Themes emerging from the study offer paths for improving the recruitment and retention of men in early childhood education and continuing the discussion of gender and power in the workplace.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	vi
LIST OF FIGURE.....	xiii
CHAPTER:	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
My Background	2
“Why don’t you give us hugs?”	2
Perfect fit for your classroom	5
“It’s Mr. not Mrs. Luginbill.”	7
Theoretical Framework.....	10
Problem.....	11
Purpose of the Study	12
Narrative Case Study	13
Research Questions.....	14
Significance of the Study	14
Limitations	16
Conclusion	16
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	18
Introduction.....	18
Feminization of Teaching	19
Shortage and Recruitment.....	23
Career Choice.....	27
Benefits and Rewards	31

	Risks and Tensions	32
	Identity	35
	Masculinities	41
	Gender Proportions	46
	Summary	48
III.	METHODOLOGY	50
	Qualitative Research	50
	Theoretical Framework	52
	Interpretive Paradigm	55
	Research Questions	56
	Narrative Inquiry	58
	Case Study	60
	Setting	61
	Participants	62
	Data Collection	64
	Life history interview	65
	Identity interview	65
	Masculinities interview	66
	Gender proportions interview	66
	Data Analysis	66
	Trustworthiness	68
	Researcher's Perspective	69
	Ethics and Subjectivity	73

IV. PROFESSIONAL LIFE HISTORIES	75
Introduction.....	75
Frank	76
Musical influences	76
Beginning of the end.....	77
Embracing early childhood.....	80
Stress free sanctuary	81
New role, new identity	84
Fun and friendly	85
Mancave, manclub, mancation	86
Silent competition	89
Special opportunities.....	90
Masculinities.....	92
Turning points, revitalization, and staying put	96
Conclusion	99
Jerry.....	99
Unlikely path and unusual experiences.....	100
Try out.....	105
Favorite, tough teacher.....	106
Relaxed and pressured	112
Learning process	115
White, male, heterosexual early childhood teacher	119
What guys do	123

Male role model	126
Gender proportions	131
The long haul	136
Conclusion	140
George.....	140
Guided into early childhood education	141
Standing out	143
Hopping around	145
Finding a Balance	150
Role Model At Home and School.....	153
Scary to fun.....	157
Quiet power.....	160
Sticking around.....	166
Conclusion	168
V. STORY INTERPRETATIONS	170
Introduction.....	170
Career Choice and Turning Points	171
No Fear, No Promotion.....	174
Gender Divide.....	177
Advantaged and Disadvantaged.....	182
Balancing Curriculum and Caring	186
Comfortably, Uncomfortable Masculinities	190
Conclusion	194

VI.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	196
	Introduction.....	196
	Social Structures: Reinforcing Male Power and Privilege	197
	Cultural Forces.....	200
	Constructing Masculinities	204
	Negotiating Identity	209
	Summary	213
	Implications for Research and Practice.....	214
	Recommendations.....	216
	Removing “male” from role model.....	217
	Recruit more dads	217
	Opportunities for administrators	219
	Cost of testing and accountability.....	221
	Finding critical mass.....	221
	Future Research	222
	Epilogue	223
	REFERENCES	227
	APPENDICES	246
A.	PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT FLYER	247
B.	LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEW GUIDE	248
C.	IDENTITY INTERVIEW GUIDE	249
D.	MASCULINITIES INTERVIEW GUIDE	250
E.	GENDER PROPORTIONS INTERVIEW GUIDE	251

F.	FIGURE 2- RESEARCH QUESTIONS-INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	252
G.	MEMBER CHECK PROTOCOL.....	253

LIST OF FIGURE

Figure 1. 3-D inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) 58

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Piglet sidles up to Pooh from behind.

“Pooh!” he whispered.

“Yes, Piglet?”

“Nothing,” said Piglet, taking Pooh’s paw.

“I just wanted to be sure of you.” (Milne, 1928)

During my fourteen years teaching third grade, first grade, and kindergarten, gender has influenced my experiences with young children. I have worked in gender skewed elementary buildings as a token male and also in a building where gender proportions were tilted (Kanter, 1977b; Sargent, 2001). My gender has been central to how I have constructed masculinities and negotiated my identity and has influenced my decision to remain in early childhood education. Throughout the course of my experiences teaching at the primary level, gender has made me question my policy regarding physical contact with students and has resulted in my masculinity being questioned by friends and colleagues. Repeatedly, administrators have placed students with behavior issues in my classroom because I was considered a male role model. I have also benefitted from my minority status when applying for new teaching positions. From

my time in the classroom and after immersing myself in the literature, I have found there is no blue print for men negotiating these unique gendered experiences. My collective experiences teaching in early childhood education, while watching male colleagues leave for administration positions, have led me to pursue research focused on the stories of men teaching young children. My desire with this study is to gain a better understanding of how men teachers navigate the early childhood school environment and how their experiences negotiating identity and constructing masculinities influence their decision to remain in the classroom.

My Background

These vignettes are snapshots of my thirteen years of experience teaching in early childhood education, which were explored during an autoethnographic pilot study.

Moments like these have drawn me to research focused on men teaching young children.

“Why don’t you give us hugs?” During the last day of a teacher preparation experience, a young girl named Sarah silently approached me from behind, unnoticed, and gave me a hug. She wrapped her arms around the back of my leg, closed her eyes, and rested the side of her head on my khaki pants. Her grip on my leg offered an uncomfortable moment for me and I was left with a situation where I didn’t know how to react. It seemed to last for hours. I quickly looked at my cooperating teacher not only for help, but to see her reaction only to find her attention focused in another direction. I looked back down at the young girl and patted her head like I would pat a dog. This brief encounter passed unnoticed by the class. This kind and loving goodbye gesture left me conflicted. On one hand, I was uncomfortable with the touching nature of giving a hug to a young girl and the perceptions that go along with it, but part of me enjoyed the nurturing thank you Sarah had offered on my last day in her classroom.

My teacher education program did a wonderful job of preparing me for the curriculum aspects of teaching such as creating lesson plans, differentiating instruction, writing assessments, and providing intervention. I was not prepared for the gendered environment of early childhood education when Sarah hugged me. The topic of physical contact was not addressed in my preparation program and during my field experiences I often kept my distance from touching students. I would give both boys and girls high fives or fist bumps on the playground or in the classroom for positive reinforcement. When students would approach me for a hug I would back away or stop their progress with a hand to the head because I was not comfortable with this aspect of my role. These field experiences were the first opportunities in which I was interacting with young children and I was more comfortable establishing physical boundaries between the students.

My first day as a third grade teacher, my principal handed me the keys to my classroom and his words of advice were, “Good luck!” Open house was three nights later, followed by the students’ first day of school. I had only three days to get my room ready for the start of the school year. The majority of my weekend involved putting up bulletin boards and getting the classroom organized, with short trips to the teacher store for supplies and breaks for food. The narrow timeline made me focus all of my attention on getting the room ready for instruction, while other topics were temporarily placed on a back burner.

By the time I started my teaching career, I had developed a hands-off approach to physical contact with students. My peers in the building warned me about touching students and my mom, who was a kindergarten teacher at the time, said “You should never be alone in the classroom with a student.” After only two short years in third grade,

I moved down to first grade and finally settled in kindergarten. The combination of sustained experience and teaching in younger grades began to erode the boundaries I had established. My hands off stance regarding physical contact with students, however, would soon meet its match.

Kindergarten students are wired to be inquisitive. They are constantly asking questions about every topic under the sun. Most of the time, within these questions, I often find a story about their own experiences, rather than a genuine interest in a topic. By spring they sometimes begin to show interest in the personal aspects of my life. Before this time some of them think I live and sleep at the school. One spring afternoon I suddenly became the topic of interest. Kindergarteners can be remarkably blunt and honest. One girl raised her hand and asked, “Are you married?” I quickly replied, “No.” She asked, “Why not?” I replied, “I haven’t found the right person yet.” I called on another student who asked, “Do you have any kids?” I responded, “Sure, all 22 kids in our room!” The class smiled and the girl followed up with, “You know what I mean, do you have any kids?” I said, “No.” Our discussion continued and I answered both the initial and follow up questions from the class. As quickly as the spontaneous interview started it was beginning to fizzle out when one young lady asked a seemingly harmless question, “Why don’t you give us hugs?” This thoughtful question left me speechless. I was at a loss for words. When I find myself in situations like this I try to buy time and said, “Great question.” I thought about her question for a few more seconds and eventually responded, “I really don’t know.” Not knowing it at the time, this moment created the momentum for improving my relationships of care with the students in kindergarten.

I began to reflect on why I never gave hugs to students. I had over eight years teaching experience. I was comfortable with my own masculinity and my nurturing role as a kindergarten teacher. At the time I wasn't ready to completely abandon my policy regarding physical contact with students, but this discussion really shook my philosophy. A few days later, as a result of our discussion, I said to the class, "On the last day of school you can have a choice: a handshake, high-five, or a hug." When I made this announcement I looked over at the young girl who had prompted me to reflect on my policy of not giving hugs and a smile crept across her face. She was glowing and seemingly had already made her decision.

Perfect fit for your classroom. When the weather changes in the Midwest every spring, students seem to be able to smell the end of the school year and summer vacation. Teachers are left squeezing in the last meaningful instructional units and keeping students on task when they would much rather be outside running around and enjoying the nice weather. During this time teachers begin working on completing the checklist of year-end activities. One of these activities at our elementary building involves creating a tentative class list of students for the teachers in the following grade. Every grade level creates a list by mixing and matching students together based on many factors including academics and behavior. We are put in the awkward position of picking out the best fit for our students in their next grade level.

This task inevitably leads to "the talk". Like clock work, every spring, one of the teachers from the grade below would visit my classroom to share the good news. "Mr. Luginbill, we have some students who are going to be a perfect fit for your classroom. They need a good male role model and could really benefit from having you in class." The first few years this conversation took place I was flattered the teacher considered

these students a good fit for my classroom. I would enthusiastically respond, “I look forward to having them in class next year.” I didn’t even stop to consider or ask why or how they came to the decision of placing specific students in my room. I was excited for the opportunity to start fresh and accept the challenge of a new group of students.

Year after year this talk seemed to be taking place at the same time of the year and involved a similar rationale for placing students in my room. My attitude began to change after three straight years of having many challenging students placed in my room. I came to realize my class was being consistently filled with high-energy students with whom teachers had behavior concerns. At the time I thought to myself, maybe I am just imagining this trend, but I was not the only one to notice. The fine arts, physical education teachers, and the playground monitors also seemed to observe how my classroom year after year had an abundance of students having a difficult time with their behavior. The challenges I faced with these students were increased by my reluctance to ask for support in dealing with their behaviors. I was not ready to admit I needed help, which was making my job even more difficult.

At the end of one particularly grueling spring day in kindergarten I was standing at the back door with the last of my students waiting for the last bus to arrive. My shirt was no longer tucked in, my tie had been taken off and placed in my front shirt pocket, and my collar was unbuttoned. Finally bus nine was called and the building was emptied out of all students. A first grade teacher walked up the stairs and made the comment to me, “Boy, do you look rough!” “Thanks,” I respond sarcastically, “It was a rough day.” She said, “I have seen that crew of boys in your room this year and they are a handful!” “Yes they are, but I like them,” I respond. “It always seems like you have a bunch of

little, excuse my French, hellions. It isn't fair that you get them every year." I said, "No, but it is what it is."

Later that spring I began preparing myself for "the talk" with the teacher from the grade below. "We have some students that could really benefit from having a male in class." Rather than responding with my usual supportive comments, though I asked, "Why do you feel like they would be a good fit in my room?" She answered, "They need a strong male presence in their lives." I asked, "How do you know they would be a good fit in my room? She said, "Because you are a male." I responded, "They wouldn't be a good fit in either of the classrooms next door?" She answered, "Oh no, they would be a good fit for any of the classrooms." I asked, "Then why are you putting these students in my room every year? You have never come down to observe my classroom. Don't you think it is creating a stereotype by placing all of the behavior concerns in my classroom because I am a male teacher?" She was shocked by this turn of events and by the look on her face I could tell she didn't want to pursue this line of questioning. She believed it was in the students' best interests to place them in my room and was not aware of the possible impact it may be having on my classroom culture. I could tell our conversation was done and in parting I said, "Just do me a favor and treat my class list the same way you would treat my other two female teammates when creating the list this year." I knew I had gotten my point across as she headed back to her classroom.

"It's Mr. not Mrs. Luginbill." Each and every morning in Kindergarten students arrive with plenty of energy, smiles, hugs, high-fives, and stories. However, the morning of a field trip is unique because students on this special day can't seem to control their excitement. Replacing the usual "Hi" or "Good morning" greetings are an abundance of questions surrounding our mystical journey to meet the tooth

fairy and learn about dental hygiene. “Where do we put our lunches?” “When are we leaving on our field trip?” “Do we have to do our morning work?” I try my best to answer these questions and create a business as usual mood in the classroom. As the students sit down to complete their morning work there is a buzz in the room. The routine of morning work typically functions as a way of calming and focusing students in preparation for academics. Field trips are the kryptonite to morning work.

After completing morning attendance, I call the students up to the carpet to go over behavior expectations on the field trip. I give them the “You are representing our school and our classroom” speech. I am not even sure why I attempt to go over expectations because most of our class is looking at the doors across the hall at two other kindergarten classrooms, which have already begun to line up for our trip. Hopefully the message was not lost on deaf ears. I give the students a chance to use the bathroom and begin asking them to find their jackets and get in line. The other two kindergarten classrooms begin heading to the buses and we fall in line behind.

Following a short bus ride, we arrive at our destination and walk inside towards a large, open cafeteria and our inquisitive students begin to look around at the school. They see a cosmetology classroom with students giving manicures and cutting hair. I am also very interested by our surroundings and find myself staring at the wigs behind the glass in the classroom. My teammate and I joke to our teaching assistants, “We are going to stay here and get a manicure and a facial, make sure you grab us on the way back to the bus.” We draw a laugh and look up to see two young high school girls wearing light blue scrubs walking towards us. They draw near and we exchange greetings and they ask, “Are you ready?”

On field trips I am always concerned about how our students behave and the perceptions being formed about our school. During our walk to the dental hygiene classrooms I am softly reminding students to slow down and to stay in line, while explaining the interesting happenings in the classrooms we are passing on our way down the hallway. The students are more interested in the industrial arts classrooms and the computer labs than behavior reminders. I cannot blame them. We arrive at the door to the dental hygiene lab and try to reorganize our group of nearly 55 students into one big long line facing the door. The dental hygiene students attempt to grab the attention of everyone, but they don't have the voice and are not sure what to do. They look at me to get our kindergarten group quiet and focused on what they have to say. Our kindergarteners quickly get quiet and the students stumble over their words and say, "Hmmm.. alright... thanks for coming are you ready to have fun? Our students respond with a resounding, "Yes!" The girls continue "Cool!...um... we have name tags for everyone!"

They begin passing the nametags out by calling the names on each tag. "O.K. first we have Mrs. Luginbill's class." In a serious tone I say, "You mean Mr. Luginbill's class?" The face of the young high school girl immediately turns red and you can see her becoming embarrassed by the mistake. She blurts out, "I am soooo sorry." I laugh off the mistake and say, "You are killing me!" I quickly follow this awkward moment up with an attempt to diffuse her discomfort by saying, "Don't worry, this isn't the first time something like this has happened." I think to myself, "and it won't be the last."

Recently, I received a voice message from a close friend. Her message said, "Hey, its Elizabeth. So, I am driving in to work and I am listening to WMAS and the announcer comes on the radio and he says: 'So now we are going to have the morning "Pledge of

Allegiance” by Mrs. Luginbill’s kindergarten class.’ “So anyway, I just had to giggle. I thought that was funny. You probably don’t find that funny.”

There was a time this was not funny, but when I called her back, we were both laughing about the morning radio show mistake. Earlier in my career I resented emasculating moments like being called Mrs. Luginbill. My resentment would be followed by embarrassment and frustration over my choice of a feminine profession. Over time these feelings have changed to amusement, but moments like these continue to occur.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in sociology because of interest in social interactions and settings (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). During the investigation of the experiences of men teaching at the early childhood level, narratives were treated as socially situated, interactive performances, produced in particular settings, for particular audiences, and for particular purposes (Chase, 2005). At the center of this study is the investigation of how men teachers remain in early childhood education and negotiate identity and construct masculinities over time. It uses the social construction of masculinities (Connell, 2005) and negotiation of identity paradigms (Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington, & Gu, 2007) as a lens to investigate the experiences of men teaching young children.

This study recognizes both internal and external factors are involved in the identity formation process (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermnut, 2004) and that identity is not stable, but a dynamic process in a constant state of flux (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000; Izadinia, 2013). It views identity as a composite of interactions between personal, professional, and situational factors (Day et al., 2007). These dimensions of identity are subject to a number of positive and negative influences,

and how teachers manage them will determine the stability of their identity (Day et al., 2007). Masculinity is an essential component of the personal and professional identity of men teaching in early childhood education (Brody, 2014). This study embraces the concept of multiple masculine subjectivities, meaning there are multiple ways to forge individual pathways as a male in society, which can include working with young children (Johnson, 2011). Men teaching in early childhood education construct masculinities through relationships with other men and in response to how they are viewed by those men (Connell, 2005). Connell's (2005) masculinity paradigm suggests men construct different masculinities and the relationship between these types can be defined. This study explores how men construct masculinities in early childhood education and how this influences their professional identity.

Problem

Men teaching in early childhood education are caught in a gender bind within a profession viewed as women's work (Sargent, 2001). Seifert (1988) describes this as an incompatibility between the cultural expectations of early education and the biographies of individual men. Their contradictory role of being nurturing and masculine, while negotiating stereotypes associated with their gender, is often involved with understanding their place, or professional identity within early childhood education (Jones, 2007). Men who choose to teach young children experience risks, rewards, and tensions (Sumsion, 1999; Sumsion, 2000b). Most elementary buildings are saturated with women, while men find themselves tokens (Sargent, 2001). There has been a public movement to recruit more men to early childhood education, but staff gender proportions at the primary level have not changed (Brody, 2014). The highly feminized environment of primary education often leads men to have to work to stay in place and climb the "glass escalator" towards

positions in administration (Williams, 1992). Historical perspectives, feminized stereotypes, status, and salary have worked to keep men out of early childhood education and those who do make the unusual choice often quickly leave for management positions (Chusmir, 1990; Cushman, 2005b; Drudy, Martin, Woods, & Flynn, 2005; Sargent, 2001). Men teaching at the primary level are frequently in the spotlight, scrutinized, under a cloud of suspicion, and viewed as representative of all men (Brody, 2014; Carter, 2008). These questions include their intentions working with young children and sexual orientation as well as having masculine stereotypes associated with them such as being interested in physical activities and sports and strong classroom management. Men teachers are simply not present in early childhood education and seldom remain in place teaching young children.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide insight into how men negotiate professional identity, construct masculinities, and remain in early childhood education. It was designed to uncover the unique stories and experiences of men who teach young children. It explored what men experience upon entering and remaining in early childhood education and sought to understand where men fit and how they situate themselves within the feminized culture of early childhood education.

Clandinin (2013) describes the need for narrative inquirers to justify their studies personally, practically, and socially. Personally, this study is important to my ongoing negotiation of identity and construction of masculinities. Attending to my own story was an important first step in this research process. Practically, this research was grounded in the need for a deeper understanding of men who made the choice and were successful remaining in the classroom teaching young children. Concentrating on the professional

histories of men who stayed makes visible how administrators can retain men teaching at the early childhood level. Socially, it is important for men teaching at the early childhood level to be included in the discourse surrounding topics like male role models, physical contact with students, and recruitment efforts. This research gives men a voice and offers them an opportunity to be part of the discussion focused on their work with young children.

Narrative Case Study

Narrative inquiry is a way of studying people's experiences (Clandinin, 2013). It offers a powerful framework for investigating how men teaching young children understand and negotiate identities and construct masculinities. This study used Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional framework as a guide for exploring the contextual influences (situated in place), past and future experiences (backward and forward), and individual understandings and responses to outside influences (inward and outward) of men teaching at the elementary level. Throughout this narrative inquiry, my attention was simultaneously focused on temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin, 2013).

This narrative inquiry focused on the stories of three men teaching young children at a small public elementary school in the Midwest. Choosing these men who work together in the same early childhood building allowed for an understanding of how men make sense of a shared context (Sisson, 2011). This bounded case was selected because of the atypical gender of the teaching staff (Stake, 2005). This study allowed me to work with men to co-compose stories of their experiences working with young children. In this research, my role as researcher involved becoming deeply involved with participants, while being able to step back and see my own stories of the inquiry, the stories of

participants, and the “larger landscape on which they all live” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 81). Narrative inquiry focuses on gaining a rich depth; therefore I chose to limit my study to three men teaching at the elementary level together.

Research Questions

This narrative case study explored the following central question: How do men teachers negotiate identity in early childhood education?

Sub questions:

1. What stories do men teachers’ professional life histories reflect?
2. What are some turning points for making the decision to stay in early childhood education?
3. How does relationship/marital/family status influence the experiences and masculinities of men who teach young children?
4. How does school context affect the experiences of men teaching young children?

Significance of the Study

During the last two decades there has been an increased interest in staff gender proportions at the elementary level, which have been heavily focused on the lack of men teaching young children (Cushman, 2006a). There continues to be considerable discourse questioning the need for more men in early childhood education (Farquhar, 1997; Skelton, 2009). Much of the literature has focused on the pre-service and early experiences of men teaching young children (Bradley, 2000; Brookhart & Loadman, 1996; Johnston, McKeown, & McEwen, 1999; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003; Sumsion, 2000b). Recently, studies have emerged focusing on the identity development and construction of masculinities in men teaching young children (Cushman, 2005a;

Cushman, 2012; Deneen, 2011; Foster & Newman, 2005; Haase, 2008; Jones, 2007).

Very little attention has focused on men who have persisted in early childhood education (Brody, 2014). By choosing to focus on three veteran men teaching in a unique elementary school context, this study addressed many of the core themes within the literature from a fresh perspective and moved the discussion forward regarding men in early childhood education.

This narrative inquiry provides a broader and deeper understanding of the complexity of the experiences of men who have chosen to make a career of teaching young children. By focusing on three men teaching in one small public elementary building, each with more than a decade of experience at the early childhood level, this study explored stories from men who have remained and continue to negotiate identities and construct masculinities. The experiences of veteran men persevering in early childhood education illuminate the possible paths available for men to stay in positions teaching at the primary level. Investigating the professional life histories of men with substantial experience working with young children offers stories to live by and learn from (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Stories are the form teachers most often use to represent their experiences (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). Adding this study to literature on the experiences of men at the primary level is an effort to understand the stereotypes and perceptions stakeholders have concerning the role men play in the development of young children. It is an essential piece for moving the conversation forward on recruiting and retaining men teachers in early childhood education (Mills, Hasse, & Charlton, 2008). This study, involving participants teaching on an elementary staff saturated with male teachers, provides a unique opportunity to explore identity and masculinities.

Limitations

One limitation of this case study is the narrow criteria for selecting participants and the lack of diversity in the early childhood environment. A narrative study often involves only one or two participants and exploring the stories of three White, heterosexual, married, middle-class men, with over ten years of experience in early childhood education, constricts the scope of the study. By focusing on a single elementary building, generalizability of findings could also be viewed as a limitation, but much can be learned from a particular case (Merriam, 2009). Another limitation is my personal relationship with the participants. My position teaching in their elementary building provides access, but it may create situational bias during the study which was managed through self-reflexive memos, member checks, and feedback from critical friends and dissertation committee members.

Conclusion

Men teachers are scarce in the educational lives of young children despite efforts from media, government, and educational organizations to recruit a larger presence. Those who do choose to work with young children often enter a feminized environment where they experience gender stereotypes and role expectations based upon the power embedded in dominant forms of masculinity. This study used narrative inquiry to explore the professional life histories of men with sustained experience teaching at the primary level. It offered a way to explore identity and masculinities within the experiences and stories of men teaching young children. This research addresses gaps in the literature and moves the discussion forward with recruiting and retaining men in early childhood education.

Similar to Sargent (2001), I consistently use the term “men teachers” rather than “male” because it has less of a biological connotation and the majority of the literature surrounding women in traditional male occupations uses the word women rather than female. Men teachers is used to emphasize how gender is central to the debates about men and teaching, while male teacher is utilized for the biological sex of the teacher (Davidson & Nelson, 2011). The focus of this study was on the experiences of men teaching in early childhood education, which included grades pre-kindergarten through third grade. The terms early childhood education, primary school, and young children were all used interchangeably throughout this study to describe men working with children age four to age nine.

This research also involves a unique elementary setting where male teachers are present in surprising numbers. Based upon a number of estimates, this case study offers a school context with male teachers present between two or three times the national average. Due to these large numbers, men teaching in this building are no longer tokens in early childhood education. This distinctive situation offers an elementary building approaching staff gender balance where men are saturated in the culture of the environment. The term gender tilted (35%) and gender balanced (40%) were used to describe the unique setting of this study (Kanter, 1977b).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

*The night Max wore his wolf suit
and made mischief
of one kind and another
his mother called him “WILD THING!”
and Max said “I’LL EAT YOU UP!”
so he was sent to bed
without eating anything. (Sendak, 1963)*

Introduction

A great deal of focus, energy and attention has been spent researching the possible need for recruiting more men to teach young children (Kaplan, 1948; Farquhar, 1997; Cunningham & Watson, 2002; Cushman, 2006a). This recruitment movement has gained momentum among policy makers, administrators, and even male teachers in early childhood education (Brody, 2014). Despite these efforts the public school teaching force in the United States continues to be predominately female. The declining numbers of men teaching in the United States public teaching force, from 40.9% in 1870 to 21.9% in 1990, demonstrates many males do not see teaching as a legitimate profession and fewer

men are choosing the path less taken of working in primary schools (Johnson, 2008; Willey, 2011). The decline of male proportions in teaching has raised questions about the overall quality of the teaching force (Drudy et al., 2005). The heavily skewed gender balance offers children very little diversity in the beginning moments of their educational journey. Early childhood education continues to be mostly White, female teachers due to the feminized nature of the profession. Today, early childhood education remains one of the most gendered occupational fields, but this has not always been the case. This review of literature identified and evaluated research focused on the gendered experiences of male teachers in primary education. It specifically explored the topics of the feminization of teaching, shortage and recruitment, career choice, benefits and rewards, risks and tensions, identity, masculinities, and gender proportions.

Feminization of Teaching

Even before public education existed, male teachers were present in colonial America providing education in homes and businesses. Education in most colonies was conducted by children's parents or within apprenticeships and the clergy operated schools where the focus was on learning traditional moral standards and Christian principles (Rury, 1989). Some children even went to tutors or masters who operated their schools for a fee. From 1700 to the middle of the 1800s teachers were predominately White, male, middle-class and young (Rury, 1989; Nelson, 2002). By the end of the eighteenth century with the arrival of "dame" schools, small elementary schools for girls, women were given their first teaching opportunities (Rury, 1989). These dame schools evolved into 'women's schools', which involved towns hiring women in the summer to teach boys and girls of various ages (Hansot & Tyack, 1988). These schools were viewed as a natural extension of instruction in the family.

During the first half of the 19th century America was expanding west while experiencing growth economically through the process of urbanization and industrialization. Teaching remained mostly White, middle-class males, but with the expansion westward, the field became increasingly female (Rury, 1989). The labor market shift, coupled with educational reforms and shifts in perceptions of female roles began the feminization of the teaching force. Schools were having a difficult time recruiting male teachers because of poor wages and its full-time occupation status. At the same time, women were limited in their range of occupations based upon the “domestic feminism ideology” of the nineteenth century (Rury, 1989). Perception of female roles began to change in the wake of educational reform, as more men left the teaching field due to poor wages, lengthening of the school year, more requirements in certification, and opportunities for higher-paid industrial jobs (Johnson, 2011). Advocates for women and schooling argued offering them the new responsibilities of educating children at public schools would prepare them for their traditional duties at home (Hansot & Tyack, 1988).

Despite resistance to women’s public employment, communities began to recognize the economic advantage of hiring female teachers to fulfill the need for teachers (Blount, 2000). With local communities being responsible for funding public education, school boards were able to hire inexpensive female teachers and pay them lower wages than men (Montecinos & Nielsen, 2004a). For women, teaching was considered work prior to getting married and starting a family. The combination of admitting girls to public schools, followed by women teachers, supported the analogy of the female teacher as mother (Hansot & Tyack, 1988). Teaching came to be viewed as an extension of the domestic duties appropriate for women (Sugg, 1978). These factors allowed elementary education to be looked upon as women’s work. As teaching began to

be associated with “mothering” a gendered division of labor occurred, eventually leading to the devaluation of feminized work relative to other masculinized professions (Martino, 2008). Men moved out of teaching because of changes in the schools, while young single women moved in to these new roles.

In 1870, two-thirds of American teachers were women and by 1900, almost three-quarters of all teachers were female (Rury, 1989). At this point, teaching was viewed as female work and men who taught young children were widely regarded as effeminate and submissive (Blount, 2000). Many men left the profession and those who remained struggled with their own masculinity. Male teaching associations and societies initiated programs designed to attract more men to the public schools (Ayers, 1911). Men who remained began taking on masculine responsibilities or moved to male niches (coaching sports and teaching math and science) or risked being regarded as feminine (Blount, 2000). These strategies and programs may have helped create a tiered set of expectations within the educational system for both men and women.

At the beginning of the twentieth century a division of labor had emerged for male and female roles in public school systems. The majority of women teachers at this time were in elementary schools, where they composed 70 percent of all public school teachers (Rury, 1989). In 1905, this was also the case in administration, where women constituted 62 percent of elementary school principals, and 95 percent of all high school principals were men (Rury, 1989). Up to this point, primary education had been a place where young women taught under the supervision of older men.

During World War II women stepped into jobs previously associated with men such as factory work and truck driving. Robinson and Huffman (1985) suggest this move may have opened the possibility that more men would take jobs held by women such as

the primary school teacher and, to combat this opportunity, some educators emphasized the feminine nature of the field to prevent men from entering early childhood education. By 1950, following World War II, the postwar “baby boom” had major effects on public education in the United States. This large jump in fertility rates led to a large influx of children to schools and a major shortage of teachers (Rury, 1989). This strained educational resources and as a result changed educational policies to open up the possibilities of married women to enter teaching (Martino, 2008). By this time feminization had come to be accepted in the field of teaching in the United States (Rury, 1989). For the moment there was no discourse surrounding the fact there were three times as many women as men in teaching. The debate would later pick up again surrounding the topic of gender equity.

Teaching in 1950 was considered a mostly White women’s profession. Less than five percent of the nation’s elementary teachers were men (Kaplan, 1948). At this time there was a debate over whether more men teachers were wanted or needed at the elementary level. Psychologists overwhelmingly shared the need for more males in public elementary schools and viewed the lack of men to be a problem (Kaplan, 1948). Some of the reasons included men would be able to: satisfy the paternal needs of the child, facilitate the masculine social development of young children, influence the personality of boys, and have a favorable and stable influence on the teaching staff. In short, young children were being deprived of the benefits men could provide them in the classroom.

Throughout history men have struggled with the perception of primary teaching as a legitimate profession. Gender dynamics and perceptions have played a central role in shaping the landscape of early childhood education. The feminization of teaching has not

only been a historical and economic process, but also a social, psychological, and educational one (Drudy et al., 2005). Occupations such as elementary teacher, which are viewed as women's work, can be considered inferior due to their gendered status. Perceiving women child care workers as mothers overshadows possible perceptions of them as teachers and professionals, while perceiving men as fathers (who cannot show affection) promotes the perception men have little to offer children (Murray, 1996). Gender proportions at the elementary level have been influenced by economics as well as beliefs about the nature of men and women. The cumulative historical and social feminization process of men avoiding teaching as a career choice can be connected to the social construction of masculinity and femininity (Drudy et al., 2005). The history of teachers in America is a fascinating story that provides insight into how and why early childhood education became a highly feminized profession. Developments and changes in society transformed American schools and exploring the gendered history behind teaching offers a way to more fully understand what men teachers are experiencing today in primary education.

Shortage and Recruitment

Men are generally not present in early childhood education. According to the 2013 Bureau of Labor Statistics, 19% of teachers in elementary and middle school and only 2.2% in preschool and kindergarten were male. Unfortunately the gender statistics are not specifically available for Pre-Kindergarten through third grade, but the proportion of men teaching in the early grades has changed very little during the past fifty years (Sargent, 2001; Williams, 2013). In 2011, the National Education Association estimated the number of male elementary teachers to be 14% and Vail (1999) reported the number to be 10% based on a study by the National Center for Education Statistics. Many factors

contributed to the feminization of the teaching profession and they continue to contribute to the lack of men in early childhood education.

In the past two decades there has been an international movement concerned with the dearth of men in elementary school teaching and how to recruit more to the profession (Brody, 2014). Farquhar (1997) found three arguments in the literature for recruiting more men. They include: the importance of a male influence in the lives of young children, differences in male teaching styles, and the significance of providing men opportunities for demonstrating responsibility with young children. The push for more men teachers is based on a number of assumptions including: men teach differently than women, children respond differently based on the sex of the teacher, and all men teachers share something similar and unique in their personal masculinity (Skelton, 2007). The discourse around these assumptions continues to be at the forefront of the literature surrounding men teachers in early childhood education.

One central argument for recruiting men to early childhood education focuses on the benefits for the children coming to school from single-parent homes (Cameron, 2001; Sumsion, 2000b). Men can serve as role models for young children, especially boys struggling from an overexposure to female teachers (Cameron, 2001; Sargent, 2001; Mills, Haase, & Charlton, 2008). Men primary teachers are often portrayed as a surrogate father who can be a positive male influence, especially for children from families with absent fathers (Allan, 1994; Jones, 2006).

The recruiting of men to serve as male role models for boys is viewed as an antidote to the highly feminized environment of the primary school (Skelton, 2012). This biological perspective pits men teachers against women and suggests they are better equipped to meet the learning and motivational needs of young boys simply because they

share the same gender (Martino, 2008). The majority of men and women primary school teachers interviewed in Carrington and McPhee's (2008) study believed more men at the elementary level would work to reduce the gender gap in achievement and improve boys' academic engagement. These perceptions are in contrast to nearly all of the research surrounding role models.

Skelton (2002) argues the perceived feminization of schooling has led to a focus on the problems young boys are experiencing in primary education. Sommers (2000) identified a crisis with young boys, which put them on the wrong side of the gender education gap. She argued boys have more early learning issues and disabilities, struggle with early literacy, and often display greater behavioral problems when compared to girls.

There is considerable debate around the effects of teacher gender on student achievement and the need for men to be role models for young children. Building on the study by Gold and Reis (1982) focused on increasing the number of male teachers working at the elementary level, Bricheno and Thornton (2007) found students did not view male teachers as role models. Driessen (2007) found teacher gender did not significantly influence primary student achievement, attitudes, or behavior regardless of the total number, phase, and year in which they had male teachers. Similarly, matching teacher and student gender has no discernible impact on either boys' or girls' academic attainment or attitudes (Carrington, Tymms & Merrell, 2008). Other research suggests otherwise, finding gender interactions between teachers and students to have statistically significant effects on test scores, teacher perceptions of student performance, and student engagement with academic subjects (Dee, 2007).

Other reasons for improving the gender balance at the elementary level include more men in early childhood education will benefit society by disrupting assumptions about gender roles, stereotypes, and responsibilities (Montecinos & Nielsen, 2004a; Sumsion, 2000b). A more balanced teaching force reflects gender in the greater society (Foster & Newman, 2005). More men teachers will improve the status and pay of the profession, as well as workplace dynamics and staff relationships for both genders (Farquhar, 1997; Sumsion, 2000b). Sargent (2004) found men could offer girls an alternative form of masculinity by offering their gentle and nurturing side.

The call for recruiting more men to teach young children has come from a range of different groups. Men working in early childhood education often receive many positive comments from stakeholders regarding how good it is to have male role models in their buildings (Sargent, 2001). Cushman (2008) found administrators in primary schools believed there were advantages for young students in having men teachers, especially those without role models in the home. Both mothers and fathers see a social need for more men teachers, surprisingly to benefit both boys and girls (McGrath & Sinclair, 2013). Both parents and students in McGrath and Sinclair's (2013) research believe that gender has no impact on academic outcomes, but that individual teacher attitudes and abilities do. The ideal man for teaching, as described by women early childhood teachers, is someone who is enthusiastic about young children, has the right philosophy, is a good listener, is not arrogant, is a team player, and is macho not a wimp (Jones, 2007). These gender balance recruitment efforts often include finding men who fit within a model of traditional hegemonic masculinity.

Not all of the research supports the need for recruiting more men to teach young children. Farquhar (1997) outlines the arguments against hiring men in early childhood

education. Men are perceived to be more likely to sexually abuse children than women (Parr, Gosse, & Allison, 2008), allowing them to enter will limit women's access to power when they move up to administration positions (Jones & Hodson, 2011), and men teachers do not offer any masculine traits women can't provide in the school setting. Simply recruiting more men may lead to the reinforcement of stereotypes associated with men teachers rather than disrupt stereotypes (Montecinos & Nielsen, 2004a). Recruitment efforts need to focus on finding the best male candidates prepared to deconstruct stereotypes and embrace gender-related situations (Cushman, 2010). Farquhar (1997) found the arguments against recruiting more male teachers to be weak.

Despite all of these recruitment strategies and movements there has been almost no change to the gender make up of elementary school teaching staffs (Skelton, 2009). Many arguments have been put forward to call for more men to work with young children and there continues to be considerable dialogue surrounding the issue of recruiting the "right kind of men" to early childhood education (Mills et al., 2008). The "right kind of men" are role models with firm, strong, and demanding qualities often linked with making schools more masculine institutions, characteristics which are at odds with the nurturing responsibilities in early childhood education (Mills et al., 2008). Recruiting more men to early childhood education offers an opportunity to provide young children with diverse learning experiences. The recruitment effort comes down to the individual men who are entering the profession, since not all men share the same personal masculinities.

Career Choice

Seifert (1988) describes the process of becoming a primary educator as beginning in childhood with the back-and-forth between family life and schooling. Men can be

influenced by many factors when making a career choice in early childhood education. In his review of the research, Lupton (2006) found both individual (preferences and choices) and social (labor market processes) explanations for why men choose to enter or avoid non-traditional occupations. Chusmir (1990) described the non-traditional career choice for men as involving an interaction of personal, family, and societal influences. Men can be pushed away or pulled into nontraditional occupations by many contemporary and traditional reasons (Hayes, 1986; Farquhar, 1997).

Men choose not to enter and remain in early childhood education because of the stereotypes that teaching is women's work, fears men teachers will harm young children, and the low status and pay (Robinson & Huffman, 1985; Galbraith, 1992; Farquhar, 1997; Johnston et al., 1999; Nordberg, 2002; Mills, 2004; Nelson, 2006). Men who choose a traditionally female career can also be perceived as stepping down in status, while women pursuing male dominated positions are moving up (DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997). Their motives can be questioned and they can be viewed as homosexual (Mills, 2004; Sargent, 2004). Students recruited to teach in primary schools viewed it as a challenging and rewarding career, but expressed concerns about negative image, pay, status, and lack of autonomy and trust (Thornton, Bricheno, & Reid, 2002). In addition, men avoid these careers because they are often counted on to financially support their families and they threaten the traditional male breadwinner role (Farquhar, 1997; Sargent, 2004).

Research indicates men and women receive different reactions to choosing a career in early childhood education. DeCorse and Vogtle (1997) found men teachers in training received subtle or abusive reactions from male peers or friends, while female reactions were layered with initial support for their sensitivity followed by surprise.

Mulholland and Hansen (2003) found men were more likely to be criticized by their friends than their parents for choice of occupation. DeCorse and Vogtle (1997) found some parents, particularly fathers, initially thought it was an inappropriate or unchallenging choice, but later became supportive. Men can experience supportive, amused, and concerned responses to their choice of a nontraditional occupation (Cooney & Bittner, 2001). Men can deflect negative perceptions by emphasizing their goal of moving into administration, giving out minimal or skewed information about their profession, or emphasizing the masculine parts of their job (Cushman, 2005a; Simpson, 2005). Men who choose to teach young children are often ridiculed or questioned rather than celebrated (Parr et al., 2008).

Men and women teachers who enter and stay in primary education have common motivations, concerns, and understandings (Skelton, 2009). Men who chose to enter the primary classroom often have the same professional obligations, expectations and training as females (Deneen, 2011). Hayes (1986) identified factors that draw men into female-concentrated occupations. They include job stability, opportunities for upward mobility, dual income in the family, personal self-fulfillment, and interactions with opposite sex. Reasons men choose to work in the nontraditional field of early childhood education include their commitment to children, enjoyment of the direct contact with them, and wanting to make a difference in their lives (Book & Freeman, 1986; Evetts, 1989; Montecinos & Nielsen, 2004a; Johnston et al., 1999; Bradley, 2000; Carrington, 2002; Cushman, 2006b). In their study of recently graduated male primary education students, Muholland and Hansen (2003) found men were motivated and encouraged to enter a highly female profession because of positive experiences working with children inside their own extended family, while coaching, and during school-based placements.

Williams and Villemez (1993) found three groups of men entering and exiting female-dominated occupations: Seekers, who actively sought female-dominated jobs, finders, who found it in the process of looking or just ended up there, and leavers, men who were in female jobs and left. Building on their research, Simpson (2005) added another group of men she identified these as settlers. Men in this group tried a variety of different, sometimes masculine jobs, and eventually settled with a feminine profession. In her study, some men were interested in moving up to management or leadership positions, but the majority, most often settlers, enjoyed the intrinsic rewards of their career and showed little interest in moving up. Men were found to enter female-concentrated occupations through a revolving door (constantly moving in and out) and a trap door (not by choice, rather circumstances) (Jacobs, 1993; Williams & Villemez, 1993). Bradley (2000) found teaching to be a short term, temporary, or transitional vocation for male elementary teacher candidates and often a second career choice.

In contrast to females, males are more likely to engage in other occupations before arriving in the teaching field (DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; Cushman, 2005b). Cushman (2006b) found men are more mature and have a different outlook on life when arriving in primary teaching as a second career choice. As these mature men arrive they often have more family experiences and opportunities to engage with children, usually their own (DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; Cunningham & Watson, 2002). After making the decision to move into primary teaching, men are often more interested in the intrinsic factors (making a difference) than the extrinsic rewards (salary) (Carrington, 2002; Cushman, 2006b; Parr et al., 2008). In her research, Cushman (2006b) found all men described job satisfaction, enjoyment, and idealism with their second career choice.

Chusmir (1990) argued personal characteristics (as cited in Brown, 1984) such as being the first born in a family, coming from a middle or working class family, and being raised by a stay at home mother were more likely found in men who make nontraditional occupational choices. He also found these men were more sensitive, less competitive, and more nurturing than men in traditional occupations. Men who enter female-dominated professions often deviate from traditional sex roles and have personality and background factors in common (Lemkau, 1984).

The research demonstrates men make the choice to enter early childhood education at different points in their lives (Williams & Villemez, 1993). There are many individual and social factors surrounding the career choice for men working with young children (Lupton, 2006). While there are many reasons men choose or avoid working in nontraditional occupations, it is important to understand the different influences involved in the decision making process when developing recruitment strategies and investigating the gender proportions at the primary level. Reasons why men choose to enter can also impact their decision to remain in the classroom for a sustained period of time.

Benefits and Rewards

Williams (1992), building on the research of Freeman (1990), which found women in male-dominated professions encounter a “glass ceiling” or invisible barriers to promotion, found, in contrast, men in female-concentrated occupations encounter a “glass escalator” effect. This is described as the invisible pressure for men to move up in their profession and uses the escalator analogy to suggest they may have to work to stay in one place. The study found men in female professions actually benefit from their token status and gain certain privileges despite their small numbers.

There are advantages for men working in feminized professions. Their token status can provide them with easier entry to the field and higher expectations for promotion (Bradley, 1993; DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997). This status can also lead to close relationships with male administrators and even preferential treatment (Williams, 1992). Men teachers experience initial hiring advantages offered by their institutions commitment to affirmative action, the welcoming of male principals because of their desire for male companionship, and the public perception male role models are needed for young children (Allan, 1993). Men in nontraditional roles can often stand out and can be routed into areas regarded as being more prestigious or offering greater rewards (Lupton, 2006). Men often receive acceptance from women into primary school teaching (Cushman, 2006a). These benefits can contribute to the reasons men choose nontraditional careers working with young children, but don't seem to be enough to keep men in these feminized positions.

Risks and Tensions

It has been difficult for society to understand why men follow paths to non-traditional jobs, since they are often associated with lower pay and prestige and men experience conflict and dissonance upon entering the field (Chusmir, 1990; Murray, 1996). The low status of the profession of teaching can lead to family and friends questioning the decisions of males deciding to become elementary teachers (DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; Cushman, 2005b). The journey through teacher preparation can be challenging and lonely for men at the primary level and often inadequately prepares them for careers in early childhood education (Cushman, 2012). Male trainees are aware of the negative attitudes towards men working with young children because of the publicity surrounding the abuse of children in the media, which can cause a shadow over their

career choice (Johnston et al., 1999). In their study, Oyler, Jennings, and Lozada (2001) found a teacher education program to remain silent regarding the differences men encounter in the primary classroom. In their study of men entering teacher education programs, Mulholland and Hansen (2003) found men experiencing feelings of awkwardness, unsettledness, and shock. Due to the shock of entering the program men teaching candidates felt as if they needed to change their behavior to fit in and attempted to connect with other males enrolled in the course. Men described their preparation and entry to teaching as coming under more scrutiny than females, were held to a higher standard, and had concerns in their social lives that their career would not be taken seriously (DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997). These undergraduate experiences may be contributing to men not being hired for elementary positions after graduation and the overall low numbers in early childhood education.

In his research, Sargent (2000) found men teachers experienced a gendered division of labor at the elementary level. They were frequently asked to do physical tasks such as lifting heavy objects or completing repairs, solving technology issues, and more likely to be assigned students with behavior issues. Sargent (2000) suggests the practice of placing discipline concerns in men's rooms impacts the climate of their class and locks them into role of disciplinarian. When men have to focus on student behavior management and other additional masculine responsibilities it can take away from nurturing activities and moments (Sargent, 2004). Simpson (2004) found men in nontraditional occupations experienced disadvantages associated with what she terms the "assumed authority effect". Some male teachers in her study shared resentment over being given difficult and challenging classrooms of students because they were thought to be better with behavior management than the female teachers in their building. The men

also experienced pressures associated with their minority status and the masculine expectations of their expertise at the elementary level. Men can have additional expectations assigned to them by school communities and stakeholders, which can encourage them to leave education or move up to administration (Deneen, 2011).

Men are under the microscope with regards to physical contact with young children (Decorse & Vogtle, 1997; Sargent, 2000; Jones, 2003). They run the risk of being viewed as a pedophile when touching children because they are often held to a different standard than women. One male teacher in Sargent's (2000) study described women's laps as places of love and men's as places of danger. Physical contact with children can be a difficult and uncomfortable issue for men to negotiate (Cooney & Bittner, 2001). Men in elementary positions who demonstrate nurturing and responsible care for children can be questioned for simply doing the job of a primary teacher, but becoming a parent can become an advantage or a socially acceptable credential opening the acceptance of their nurturing behavior (Sumsion, 2000a). Unless men remain in the field for extended periods of time or come in to the field as a second career they will be unable to cash in on this now acceptable behavior of physical contact with students, following the birth of their own children.

Allan (1993) described male primary teachers experiences as disadvantaged because of the conflict and contradiction associated with their maleness. He even argued advantages such as hiring preference and relationships with male administrators, can potentially turn into disadvantages or lead to moments of uneasiness for the male teachers in early childhood education. The paucity of men in primary schools leads to them often feeling isolated or vulnerable (Allan, 1993; Parr et al., 2008). In contrast, Richardson

(2012) found men teaching together at the elementary level resort to hypermasculine behaviors, which have a detrimental effect on the culture of the building and staff.

Brody (2014) shares men who teach young children are expected to be role models, but are often discouraged from interacting in ways a father might at home. They are expected to raise the status and salary of the profession (Nordberg, 2002). Men often have their masculinity questioned or challenged when they choose to work and perform a feminine role in the mostly female environment of early childhood education (Lupton, 2006). Williams (2013) suggests when men are not expected to conform to stereotypical masculine behavior they won't have to struggle to stay in their profession or feel pressure to move up to a leadership position in administration, thus negating the "glass escalator" effect. The research shows men teachers at the elementary level experience unique gendered advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, understanding how men negotiate these tensions and contradictions and how they influence their decision to remain in the classroom, leave the field of education, or move up to administration are important for both the recruitment and retention of men in early childhood education.

Identity

In their review of teacher identity research, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) outline central obstacles in developing an understanding of identity. They include comprehending the role of emotion and reflection, the contextual factors, the link between identity and agency, and the connection between identity and self. Common throughout much of the foundational research on identity is the central importance of understanding the self and how it is related to an individual's personal beliefs, attitudes, and actions (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006).

Cooley (1902) found individuals, through interactions with others, are able to attach symbolic meanings to the behaviors they observe. Through these interactions and observations they are able to take their perspectives and picture how others they might view them. He referred to this as the “looking glass self” and described the formation of self as a reflexive process in which people develop values, attitudes, roles, and identities over time.

Building on this idea, Mead (1934) argued social interaction is critical to the development of self. Through talking to others, people are able to understand the attitudes people hold toward them and this shapes how they see themselves. People develop a sense of self through interactions, but not all of these are equal. Cooley (1902) believed “significant others” had a powerful effect on an individual’s self-concept. Mead (1934) took this one step further and described the importance of “generalized others” on developing a sense of self. In other words, individuals internalize attitudes not just of individual people, but also through interactions with organized social groups. These multiple selves show up depending on the social context or situation people find themselves in and the generalized others present at the time. This self develops through exchanges with the environment, which results in a sociological component (me) and a personal component (I) (Mead, 1934).

Today, simply defining the concept of identity can be difficult and many studies do not offer a definition (Beijaard et al., 2000; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Identity can be defined as who or what someone is and how we see ourselves in relation to being the same as or different from others (Beijaard, 1995; Pullen & Simpson, 2009). Gee (2000) describes identity as a “certain kind of person in a given context”. Despite multiple descriptions of identity, Murray (2013) found most research agrees that both

internal and external factors are involved in the formation process (Beijaard et al, 2000). Internal and external components involved in identity development need to be balanced and negotiated because professional roles need social legitimacy (Murray, 2013). Sachs (2005) describes professional identity as the central framework a teachers use during their experiences to constantly negotiate and situate themselves at work and within society.

In their review of the research, Beijaard et al., (2000) identified four essential components of professional identity. They include: professional identity is an ongoing, dynamic process that answers the questions “Who am I at the moment and who do I want to become?”, professional identity involves both the individual and the context, professional identities consist of sub-identities that can be in harmony or conflict, and agency is important in professional identity. Identity formation occurs between the interaction of the personal and professional identities, which involve structure (relations between power and status) and agency (influence others and we have) (Day et. al, 2006). Teacher identity is involved with decisions about their practices, classroom content, and relationships with students (Beijaard et al., 2000). Teachers develop a professional identity based on interpretations and interactions of their context, which influence their job satisfaction, commitment, self-efficacy, and motivation (Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink, & Hofman, 2011). Changes in a teacher’s identity involve fluctuations in knowledge, voice, self-awareness, confidence, and relationships with colleagues and stakeholders (Izadinia, 2013).

Gee (2000) describes identity as a complicated construct that changes depending on context or external influences. He created four ways to look at identity: nature-identity (developed from someone’s natural state), institution-identity (resulting from an authority position), discourse-identity (recognized from the dialogue of others about oneself), and

affinity-identity (established through experiences with outside groups). Throughout the research it is clear teacher identity is not stable, but rather dynamic and in a constant state of flux (Beijaard et al., 2000; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Izadinia, 2013).

Based on their longitudinal research project investigating variations in teachers' work, lives and effectiveness, Day and Kington (2008) found identity to be a composite of the interactions between personal, professional, and situational factors. Professional identity was influenced by competing and conflicting elements of educational policies, social trends, workload, roles and responsibilities. The different levels of support and feedback with students and administrators at the local school or classroom level influenced situated identity. Personal identity was influenced by roles outside of school involved with family and friends. Teacher identities can change over time due to individual experiences and school contexts (Day et al., 2007). Also in their identity research, Day et al. (2007) created six professional life phases describing the commitment, identity development, tensions and transitions, and challenges to sustain motivation teachers' experience during the stages of their career. They found professional life phases and sense of identity influence the experiences of all teachers.

In research with primary school teachers, Nias (1989) found primary teachers' identity is based on how they conceptualize and enact their work based upon their personal values or belief systems. Nias described these values in two general kinds: values representing education as the translation of social, moral, or religious ideals and those required of individuals to carry out the job. She found primary teaching to be inclusive, which encouraged some of her participants to merge their personal and occupational self-image, while others distance themselves from their work identity.

Vogt (2002) developed a continuum of caring scale to investigate the ways primary teachers negotiate their professional identity. The types of caring ranged from caring as commitment, caring as relatedness, caring as physical care, caring as expressing affection, caring as parents, and caring as mother. It moves from a professional identity as a caring identity to a highly exclusive professional identity as a caring teacher, with femininity at one end and a less gendered identity at the other. No gender differences were found and both men and women primary teachers employ an ethic of care when reflecting on teaching (Vogt, 2002).

Nias (1989) and Sumsion (2002) suggest teacher identities are constructed through the interconnectedness of personal lives and professional experiences. Men who choose to enter the world of early childhood education are faced with the challenging task of constructing their professional identities despite historically dated ideas and perceptions of what men can and should do (Sumsion, 2000a). Men at the elementary level experience complex contradictions when negotiating their identity as teachers and their identity as men (Sargent, 2000; Jones & Hodson, 2011). If men are not prepared to negotiate these unique expectations and gender dynamics they may move to administration or even out of the profession (Deneen, 2011).

Identity formation may cause role strain for men who choose to enter a female-concentrated occupation, which can lead to men being self-conscious of their role and give them trouble developing their occupational identity (Hayes, 1986). Both men primary teachers and administrators can have different identities constructed for them by stakeholders and society (Jones & Hodson, 2011). First teaching placements can result in “knock backs” from “identity bruising”, confusion, and a questioning of their career choice (Foster & Newman, 2005; Cushman, 2012). As a result of “identity bruising” men

complied, resisted, or developed alternative strategies in constructing and reconstructing their identities (Foster & Newman, 2005). Men who remain in early childhood education were found to have strong agency, control, resilience, and self-confidence, which they used to navigate the complex process of doing gender while teaching (Deneen, 2011; Brody, 2014).

King (1998) describes otherness as a challenging social process by which men teachers in early childhood resemble or are different from the females in their field and how they navigate these similarities and differences. Factors, such as construction of gender, awareness of community perceptions of teaching young children as women's work, and suspicion around men who choose a feminine career, contribute to men primary teachers negotiating their otherness (Sumsion, 2000a). In his ethnographic study, Richardson (2012) described the experiences of a group of men at the elementary level, which he called a boys' club. The social members of this club chose to perform hypermasculinity, fought against being like their female colleagues and the men in the building they labeled "others", and revolted against the feminized environment of the elementary setting. While the men considered "others" in his study experienced isolation, intimidation, confusion and hurt, the boys' club members spent most of their time acting masculine and lacking interest in their educational responsibilities. When men separate themselves from the feminine aspects of their position, unequal values will be attached to the work done by men and women (Haase, 2008). Lupton (2000) found men in non-traditional occupations experience a misalignment of their gender and occupational identities. The research on the professional identity of men in early childhood education demonstrates they experience unique gendered circumstances and understanding this process is important in teacher development as well as supporting men choosing to teach

young children. It also indicates the importance of exploring how masculinities influence the identity of men teaching at the elementary level.

Masculinities

Within a teacher's professional identity are sub-identities, which to varying degrees influence their overall identity (Beijaard et al., 2000). Men teachers in early childhood education continually construct and negotiate their masculine identities (Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Francis & Skelton, 2001). Men teachers experience advantages (Williams, 1992; Bradley, 1993; DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; Sumsion, 2000b) as well as tensions in early childhood education (Sargent, 2000; Sumsion, 2000b; Deneen, 2011; Brody, 2014). Many of the issues men teachers experience are a result of gender role strain, contradictions, and inconsistencies (Kadushin, 1976). A gap exists between the perceptions society holds on masculinity and the mothering discourse in the education of young children (Sabbe & Aelterman, 2007). Society is heavily influenced by masculinity and heterosexual traditions such as the nuclear family and female caregivers (Jones, 2006). It is also important to recognize the role movies, social media, and even children's literature play in influencing how individuals and even children develop cultural values and gender stereotypes (Crisp & Hiller, 2011).

Gender is a socially constructed reality that manifests itself within power, production, emotion, and symbols (Connell, 2005). Hansot and Tyack (1988) argue for the importance of thinking institutionally when attempting to understand gender in schools. Gender is embedded in power relations, division of labor, patterns of emotion, and symbolization within schools (Connell, 1996). Connell (1996) describes these intersecting structures of relationships as allowing schools to create institutional

definitions of masculinity. Within any workplace there are different understandings and ways of doing masculinity (Connell, 1996).

Connell (2005) uses the concept of masculinity to describe a person's behavior based on the type of person they are and how they do gender in a culturally specific way. "Masculinity is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture" (p. 71). Gender is viewed as a social practice and masculinity as a configuration of that practice (Simpson, 2004). Men create their masculinity through relationships with other men and in response to how other men view them (Connell, 2005). Men's perceptions of others' expectations about masculinity influence how they behave, form behaviors, and negotiate masculinity at the elementary level (Allan, 1994).

Prior to 1970, masculinity was referred to as the male sex role theory, which viewed the development of traits and attitudes as natural and culture-free (Smiler, 2004). Hegemonic masculinity appeared as a reworking of this binary biological model (Hobbs, 2013). Connell (2005) developed a masculinity paradigm, which included four types. The relationships that exist between the four types of masculinities offer a way to understand the social structures men must negotiate when they cross an occupational gender boundary (Brody, 2014). Hegemonic is the culturally dominant masculinity that holds power over the others. Other masculinities can be subordinate or ranking below the hegemonic standard. One example is homosexuality, which historically has been oppressed. Heterosexual men and boys can also experience subordinate masculinity through feminist associations such as wimpy or sissy. Sargent (2004) adds men who care for children to the examples of subordinate behaviors that threaten the legitimacy of

hegemonic masculinity. Since most men are not able to meet the hegemonic standard of masculinity, Connell (2005) created complicit masculinities. Complicit masculinities are those that do not embody hegemonic processes, but benefit from the ways in which hegemonic masculinities construct the gender order and regimes. Brody (2014) notes that men in early childhood education can be forced into asserting traditional masculine behaviors so they can avoid being identified with subordinate masculinities. Lastly, Connell used marginalized masculinity to describe the dominant relationship men have over lower social classes.

Masculine identity development is an interactive process involving men's awareness of society's masculinity expectations, challenges they experience in meeting expectations, and learning to perform masculinities aligned with their own beliefs and values (Edwards & Jones, 2009). Relationships between the different masculinities and social structures at the primary level are located within the gendered experiences of men teachers (Brody, 2014). Society often depicts men as being successful, competitive, and success-oriented rather than warm, open, and nurturing, which can drive men teachers to negotiate between being "real traditional men" and being "good nurturing teachers" (Sabbe & Aelterman, 2007, p. 530). Men are often challenged with the process of constructing their identity between being a real man in an environment considered women's work (Smith, 2004). Men can reproduce or renegotiate gender relations in female-concentrated occupations by emphasizing similarities or actualizing thoughts about differences (Nordberg, 2002). In her research, Jones (2007) found male primary teachers produced both dominant and subordinate masculinities during their identity formation. The pervasiveness, contradictions, and complexities of hegemonic masculinity

influenced the participant in Sumsion's (1999) study to leave the field of primary education.

Upon entering early childhood education, men can perceive challenges to their masculinity (regendering, feminization, stigmatization) and use different approaches to resolve their masculine identity (Lupton, 2000). Lupton found men in his study meeting these threats by reconstructing the profile of their position by highlighting the masculine aspects and by reconstructing their own masculinity to fit the female work environment of early childhood education. For example, in Smedley's (2007) study her male participant reinvented the home-corner play center into a workshop.

During his study of men primary teachers Sargent (2000) found the men brought up the topic of male role model, rather than the researcher. They saw themselves as father figures for children from single parent families and viewed this role as what is needed and asked for by administrators, teachers, and parents. The parents expected the male primary teachers to be the man in the lives of their children through the use of authority and discipline. Since early childhood education is often associated with nurturing and mothering men have several choices regarding their role with young children. Young children in primary education often grab, lean against and hug caregivers putting men in vulnerable positions (Jones, 2003). One compensatory strategy men use in early childhood education when encountering nurturing moments with students involves substituting alternative solutions such as breathing exercises or pats on the back to avoid physical contact such as hugs (Sargent, 2004).

Simpson (2004) explored masculinities by asking men in female-concentrated occupations to reflect on perceptions of their job and their own self-image. She found men in her study used several different strategies to deflect discomfort centered on their

feminized career choice to make their position sound more masculine. Some men re-labeled their position or simply omitted details to make the context of their job more vague. Other men shared their job and quickly emphasized the masculine aspects of their everyday work like coaching after school, playing physical games with children, and providing a role model for students. Simpson (2005) also explored the potential conflict between men in nontraditional occupations and their gender role and identity. While some men claimed to have no problems, she found embarrassment, discomfort, and shame to be common themes from most men in her study. They often used the word stigma to describe the reactions of others to their unique role. Simpson suggested the internal feelings, how they felt about themselves, and the external perceptions, how they were perceived by others, resulted in role strain in the majority of men. Men teaching young children experience the usual social pressure to demonstrate appropriate constructions of masculinity or risk being marginalized or constructed as “other” by peers (Francis & Skelton, 2001). When men distance themselves from the feminized responsibilities, they are working to maintain masculinity and femininity as separate and exclusive from each other (Wingfield, 2009).

Both men and women primary teachers find themselves within the culture of primary education where definitions of masculinity have been shifting (Jones, 2006). There are multiple ways of being a man in early childhood education and therefore a variety of masculinities are enacted (Skelton, 2007). Brody (2014) describes masculinity as an issue central to the experiences of men teachers in early childhood education. He found masculinity definitions as determining the type of male role model men teachers represent in the classroom and influencing how they touch and care for young children. Further research is needed into the complex ways in which hegemonic, heterosexual

masculinities dictate, limit and constrain men teachers in early childhood education (Martino & Frank, 2006).

Gender Proportions

Men in female-concentrated environments may use different strategies as a response when dealing with challenges of masculinity (Lupton, 2006). They can over emphasize career aspirations or disassociate from the profession (Williams, 1995), highlight masculine aspects of their occupation duties (Pringle, 1993), and even seek to be identified with hegemonic groups (Floge & Merrill, 1986). The gendered landscape of early childhood education offers men a contradictory social situation because of gender proportions (Allan, 1994).

Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977a) developed a token theory based on the lack of a gender balance in the workplace. Her research described three common experiences women had in male dominated occupations. Their numbers were so small they received heightened attention leading to more pressure to perform well. They were isolated by the majority and felt their differences were exaggerated. They often found themselves in stereotyped situations and encouraged to behave in gender-defined ways. Kanter defined tokens as members of a subgroup constituting of less than 15 percent of the entire group. When the ratio of males to females becomes more balanced, individuals are treated less as symbols or tokens and more as individuals (Kanter, 1977a). Today, men teachers in early childhood education find themselves positioned as tokens in a profession saturated with women (Sargent, 2004).

In her research, Simpson (2004) looked at how men's experiences in female-concentrated occupations are affected by their token status. After asking the men to reflect on their minority status, she found four key themes, which she labeled the career

effect, assumed authority effect, special consideration effect, and the zone of comfort effect. The men who viewed their token status as giving them advantages, experienced the career effect including hiring preferences, role model status, added responsibilities, and the rapid opportunity for advancement. In addition to these benefits, men shared how their minority status provided them additional privileges with the special consideration effect where men described how older women were protective, accommodating and lenient with rules and expectations. Nearly all of the men teachers experienced the assumed authority effect (Simpson, 2004). The men saw their status as providing them with greater authority compared to their female counterparts because they were perceived to handle student discipline and behavior management more effectively. Lastly, the comfort zone effect was experienced by all but one of the men in her study. The men described their experiences in nontraditional positions as relaxed, positive, and a source of comfort. They enjoyed working with women and one male described the lack of men as a nice break from competition and having to showcase masculinity.

In her study of elementary principals, Cushman (2006a) found most believed a gender balance to be important for their elementary building, but it did not compromise their decision to hire the best candidate. A better staff gender balance would help to challenge the stereotype that early childhood education is a feminized area, give boys and girls opportunities for more diverse career choices, and make school more representative of society (DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; Jones, 2006; Cushman, 2008). In her research, Cushman (2008) hypothesizes that increasing the number of men teachers in early childhood education can help their gender visibility in the profession and their vulnerability as a token member of a teaching staff. Cunningham and Watson (2002) stress the importance of critical mass when recruiting men to early childhood education.

Only recruiting one man will lead to isolation, a couple will be considered a novelty, and significant numbers will possibly lead to the acceptance of men as teachers of young children.

Summary

Johnson (2011) describes the literature written about male primary teachers within the following storyline: “against a menacing tide of false accusations, scrutiny from colleagues, and skepticism from family and friends, the heroic male teacher forges ahead because of his unyielding dedication to the shaping of young minds” (p. 247). He differentiates between the terms “problem” and “conversation” in his discussion of the literature focused on men teaching young children. While the literature clearly identifies the lack of male teachers as a problem (Drudy et al., 2005; Lahelma, 2000; Martino, 2008), Johnson (2011) describes the gender disparity in teaching to be problematic because it is not consistent with core democratic values like equity and equal opportunity. He views the conversations centered on boys’ underachievement and male role models as creating problems since they are confirming, not challenging sexist stereotypes regarding the roles of men with young children (Johnson, 2011). He suggests moving on from the discussion of men experiencing peril, crisis, fear and suspicion towards an alternative conversation involving multiple subjectivities and inclusivity of difference. He calls for the focus to be on “identifying the cultural conditions limiting male participation in teaching, how they prohibit teaching as masculine practice, and how to adjust these conditions so that teaching becomes a more diverse profession” (p. 264).

In conclusion, the review of literature demonstrates men teachers are not present in early childhood education for many reasons, despite heavy recruitment efforts. The men who choose to teach young children are exposed to gendered advantages, risks, and

tensions. Their decisions to stay, leave, or move up to administration are influenced by their personal values, places they teach, and their interactions with stakeholders, family, and friends. It is evident masculinity is central to the identity development of men in feminized positions and the gender proportions at the elementary level leave men as a conflicted minority. Teaching and caring for young children are appropriate and necessary roles for men and women (Nelson, 2011). Men can contribute to the segregated gender roles in education by choosing not to do a mothering role in their primary classrooms (Haase, 2008). Changes in family composition, divorce rates, and the majority of teachers at the elementary level being female give young children little exposure to men and a possible range of masculinities (Nelson, 2006). The current culture of early childhood education emphasizes dominant masculinities and limits the opportunities for children to be exposed to a variety of masculinities in their school environment when they are developing and exploring their personal identities and relationships (Cushman, 2008). Men who display a range of masculinities are needed to teach young children in early childhood education (Mills et al., 2008).

This review of literature shaped the methodology chosen for this qualitative study. It will not be an attempt to continue to paint men teachers as victims in early childhood education. Rather, it offered a way to explore the sustained experience of veteran men early childhood teachers in positions where few enter and even fewer remain in place over time. It moves the discussion forward on identity and masculinities in early childhood education. It is an opportunity to investigate gender and power dynamics in a unique school context where men are no longer tokens and have numerically saturated the early childhood teaching environment.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

*“Not so long ago, before she could even speak words,
Trixie went on an errand with her daddy...” (Willems, 2004).*

Qualitative Research

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gather and describe the stories of men who have been successful entering and remaining in early childhood education. Other studies involving men at the elementary level focused on identity (DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; Deneen, 2011; Foster & Newman, 2005; Jones, 2003; Jones, 2007; Murray, 1996; Oyler et al., 2001; Parr et al., 2008; Rabelo, 2013; Smedley, 2007; Sumsion, 1999; Sumsion, 2000a; Sumsion, 2002; Vogt, 2002), risks and rewards (Cushman, 2005b; Davidson & Nelson, 2011; Sumsion, 2000b; Sumsion, 2005), role models (Allan, 1994; Bricheno & Thornton, 2007; Carrington et al., 2008; Cushman, 2008; Martino, 2008), and masculinities (Brody, 2014; Cushman, 2012; Francis & Skelton, 2001; Haase, 2008; Nordberg, 2002; Richardson, 2012; Sargent, 2001; Wedgwood, 2005). The majority of these qualitative studies utilized a narrative methodology, while phenomenology, ethnography, and case study approaches were used sparingly. The consistent choice of narrative research offered researchers a methodology to deeply explore the stories of men

teaching at the primary level. The researchers looked at groups of men in teacher preparation programs and individual men in the field, overwhelmingly describing their experiences as token members. Throughout the literature, little attention has been given to the experiences of veteran men teaching with other men in early childhood education.

This gap was addressed through the exploration of the individual stories and experiences of men with over ten years of experience teaching in an elementary setting saturated with other male teachers. National averages estimate the number of male teachers at the elementary level to be between 10% and 14% (National Education Association, 2011; Vail, 1999). Kanter (1977b) used the term “tilted” to describe gender proportions at ratios of 65:35 and the term “balanced” for ratios 60:40. The elementary setting selected for this unique case study had balanced staff gender proportions (40%) during the 2013-2014 school year and tilted proportions (35%) during the 2014-2015 school year.

The intent of this qualitative case study was to uncover how men teaching young children make sense of and negotiate their professional identities and construct masculinities. Merriam (2009) shares “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). Employing a qualitative approach for this study allowed for a detailed and holistic account of the experiences of men teaching at the primary level, while giving them voice about the meaning of their experiences (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research offers the potential for meaningful investigation into the lives and experiences of men teaching at the elementary level.

Theoretical Framework

This study was rooted in sociology because of a perspective that emphasizes the social construction of gender. Kimmel and Messner (2013) note “the identity of men is developed through a complex process of interaction with the culture in which we both learn the gender scripts appropriate to our culture and attempt to modify those scripts to make them more palatable” (p. xvi). Gender was central to this study because of its large role in the lives of men in early childhood education. Gender has the ability to create power, identity, and inequality problems (Skelton, 1993). In primary schools male teachers are involved with the perpetuation of particular constructions of gender and sexuality in the classroom (Francis & Skelton, 2001). Gender is a socially constructed reality that manifests itself within power, production, emotion, and symbols (Connell, 2005). Although individuals experience gender as a part of their identity, the concept of masculinity is produced within institutions and daily interactions (Kimmel & Messner, 2013). Therefore this study explored the experiences of men teachers in a gender balanced elementary school context using the negotiation of identity (Day et al., 2007) and the construction of masculinities paradigms (Connell, 2005).

Identity was the central construct being used to explore the experiences of veteran male teachers in this study. The concept of identity is based on the work of Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934), which found social interaction to be critical in the development of self. It views identity as who or what someone is and how we see ourselves in relation to being the same or different from others (Beijaard, 1995; Pullen & Simpson, 2009). It recognizes both internal and external components are involved in the negotiation of identity (Murray, 2013). This process is not stable, but rather a dynamic process in a constant state of flux (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2000; Izadinia,

2013). Teacher identities can change over time due to individual experiences and school contexts (Day et al., 2007).

Day et al. (2007) developed a framework for examining the lives of teachers that will be used in this study. It describes the identity process as involving a composite of interactions between personal, professional and situational factors. Professional identity can be influenced by educational policies, social trends, and workloads or responsibilities. Situated identity can be influenced by local level support and feedback teachers receive. Family and friends outside of school can influence personal identity. Based on this model Day et al. (2007) created six professional life phases describing the commitment, identity development, tensions and transitions, and challenges to sustain motivation teachers' experience during different moments of their career. This model allowed for a deep exploration of the social and contextual influences men experience during their professional experiences.

Throughout this study masculinity was viewed as a sub-identity that men in early childhood education continually construct and negotiate (Francis & Skelton, 2001). For the purposes of this research masculinity was referred to as the social roles, behaviors, and meanings prescribed for men by society. In multicultural societies like the United States there are multiple definitions of masculinity (Connell, 1996). The meaning of masculinity can be different for the rich, poor, working-class, or middle-class and more than one type of masculinity can be found within a cultural setting (Connell, 1996). Masculinities can be influenced by video games, movies, and even children's picture books (Crisp & Hiller, 2011). Skelton and Francis (2001) identify the classroom as a site for the construction of masculinity and view male teachers being motivated to adopt masculine positions because of their feminized position as problematic. Men create their

masculinity through relationships with other men and in response to how other men view them (Connell, 2005). For this reason, this study exploring the experiences of men teaching on a gender balanced elementary staff is an important piece in the ongoing masculinities discussion.

Connell's (2005) masculinity paradigm was used to investigate the relationships between the masculinities constructed by men teaching in early childhood education. His model is based on the idea men construct different masculinities and there are relationships between them (Connell, 2005). At the top of the model is hegemonic masculinity, which is the culturally dominant masculinity that holds power over all the others (Connell, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is the pattern of practice that allowed men's dominance over women to continue (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Although only a small portion of men actually enact it, it is a construct that men strive to produce and many position themselves in relation to it (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Other masculinities can be subordinate or rank below the hegemonic standard. Sargent (2004) uses men who care for young children as an example of a subordinate behavior because it threatens the legitimacy of the hegemonic standard. Complicit masculinities are those that do not embody the hegemonic processes, but benefit from them. Brody (2014) notes men in early childhood education who over emphasize hegemonic masculine qualities like playing sports or being strong with technology are complicit in their support of these masculine behaviors. Lastly, Connell (2005) used marginalized masculinity to describe the dominant relationship men have over lower social classes. This framework offered a way to investigate and interpret the power dynamics in a school context considered by society to be feminine, but in this study has a gender-balanced elementary staff.

This study investigated the professional life histories of veteran male teachers at the elementary level. It was guided by identity (Day et al., 2007) and masculinities (Connell, 2005) frameworks. It focused on how men teachers remain in the classroom and the unusual school context where they were situated. Gender and power guided this social inquiry into the lives of men who teach young children.

Interpretive Paradigm

Creswell (2013) defines qualitative research as beginning with assumptions, worldviews, theoretical lenses, and the study of research problems. A social constructivist worldview influenced my research design, questions and approaches to data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). Throughout this study, I embraced the idea of multiple, subjective realities and recognize knowledge is a product of how we come to understand these realities (Braun & Clarke, 2013). A constructivist paradigm views the experiences of participants as socially and historically negotiated through interaction with others (Creswell, 2013). The view that knowledge is generated through interaction makes the researcher-participant relationships critically important (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). This study, in line with social constructivist epistemology, viewed the research process as a collaborative partnership between the participants and the researcher. The collaboration took place over time, in a series of places, and in social interaction with particular milieu (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The multiple views and meanings of the participants was relied upon to develop an understanding of their situations and experiences and to facilitate deep and meaningful relationships between researcher and participants.

My role as the researcher was to construct knowledge with participants (Merriam, 2009). Narrative inquirers enter into research relationships with participants in the midst of their lives (Clandinin, 2013). Being in the midst means that even when both researcher

and participants come together they continue to live their stories, even as they tell stories of their experiences over time (Clandinin, 2013). I was in the midst of my personal, professional, and researcher lives throughout this narrative inquiry, while the participants were in the midst of their own personal, professional, and situational lives as well. The location for each interview was selected to explore the experiences across personal and professional sites.

Another central aspect of my role as researcher was to live and work alongside participants by coming to experience what can be seen and heard and also the things not said and not done (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is important to engage in intensive autobiographical narrative inquiries before working with participants (Clandinin, 2013). My experiences as a seasoned male teacher in early childhood education will influence the research process and co-construction of meaning, making it important to continually examine my personal values, beliefs, and characteristics (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). Throughout this narrative inquiry I was attentive to who I am and who I was becoming within the study. The emergent nature of my research design, the importance of context, and the inductive data analysis situate this study squarely within a social constructivist paradigm.

Research Questions

This narrative inquiry was guided by the following central research question: *How do men teachers negotiate identity in early childhood education?* To think narratively about the experiences of men teaching young children, four supporting research questions were designed to explore their stories in a three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The inward and outward questions, within the personal-social dimension of narrative inquiry, explore feelings, hopes, and reactions as well as

environmental conditions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). By investigating these questions looking backward and forward, temporality was addressed in the past, present, and future (Clandinin, 2013). Focusing on the experiences of three men working in the same elementary building, a deeper examination of the social landscape was possible. The supporting questions uncovered secret (classroom), sacred (theory-driven view of practice), and cover (expert stories) stories, leading towards a richer understanding of how men teaching at the elementary level negotiate identities and construct masculinities (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996). To address the broad research question, several related questions were pursued as indicated below:

1. What stories do men teachers' professional life histories reflect?
(backward)
2. What are some turning points for making the decision to stay in early childhood education? (forward)
3. How does relationship/marital/family status influence the experiences and masculinities of men who teach young children? (inward/outward)
4. How does school context affect the experiences of men teaching young children? (situated in place)

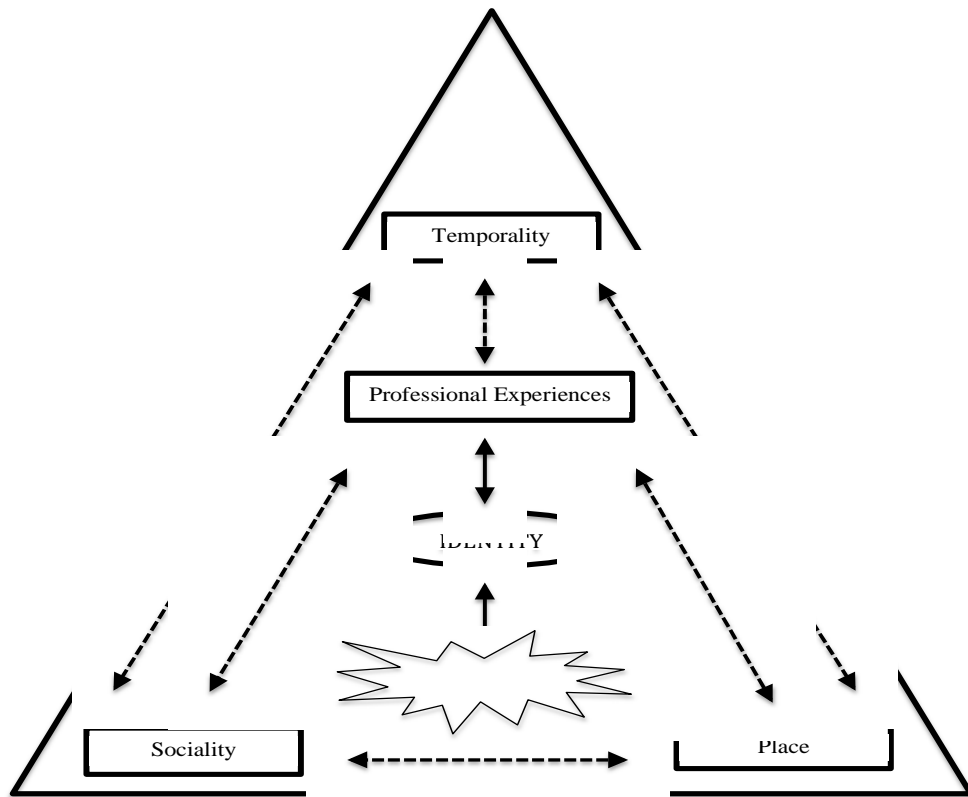


Figure 1. 3-D inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative has a rich history in qualitative research dating back to the Chicago School sociologists in the 1920s and 1930s (Chase, 2005). Since 1990, there has been a rapid interest in using narrative inquiry to study experience (Clandinin, 2013). This narrative movement gained momentum from Bruner (1986) and his belief that personal meaning and reality can be constructed during the making and telling of one's narratives. Chan (2012) identified Schwab (1958) as one of the first educational theorists to pay close attention to the lived experiences of teachers and children in the classroom. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) would later apply Schwab's (1958) commonplaces to create a conceptual framework for narrative inquiry.

Contemporary narrative inquiry shows interest in biographical particulars narrated by the ones who live them (Chase, 2005). Narrative inquiry is a collaborative approach to the study of human lives, which uses experience as a source of knowledge and understanding (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Clandinin, 2013). It uses stories to describe human action because people lead individually and socially storied lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1995). Sharing stories is a way people often share their experiences and come to understand them. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) describe the focus of narrative inquiry on both the experience of an individual and the social, cultural, and institutional narratives where experiences are shaped and enacted. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) developed the term narrative inquiry based upon Dewey's (1938) theory of experience. His principles of continuity, interaction, and situation, provide an understanding of experience as a continuous interaction of human thought with the personal and social environment, which sets the foundation for three-dimensional narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Harfitt, 2015).

Narrative inquiry is often used in studies centered on educational experience within a professional-knowledge landscape (Chase, 2005; Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2010).

Engaging in narrative inquiry involves thinking within three commonplaces: temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin, 2013). The temporality commonplace leads narrative inquirers to the past, present, and future of people, places, things, and events under study. Narrative inquirers attend to both personal and social conditions in the sociality commonplace. Lastly, place is defined as "the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequence of places where the inquiry and events take place" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). In narrative inquiry these commonplaces are

explored simultaneously, rather than looked at in isolation (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin et al., 2007). This study of three men teaching young children used Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry model to investigate their experiences forward and backward, inward and outward, and situated in place.

Case Study

Case studies can be used to focus on contextual settings and the culture within a group (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Merriam (2009) defines a case study as an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system. In his research, Stake (2005) identified three types of case studies (intrinsic, instrumental, and collective). Intrinsic case studies are used because the case itself is of interest (Stake, 2005). Case studies can be selected for their uniqueness and selecting atypical cases offers a way to understand a variety of human experience (Merriam, 2009). This current qualitative study utilized an intrinsic case study approach because of my interest in the experiences of men teaching in a gender balanced elementary building.

Arriving at an intrinsic narrative case study occurred after immersing myself in the literature and reflecting on my personal experiences. During this time, I attended multiple early childhood education conferences and workshops. Looking around the room during these professional development opportunities, I was quickly able to identify the one or two other men in the room among hundreds of female teachers. I gravitated towards these men during breakout sessions, briefly discussed their experiences as token members of their buildings, and was even able to gather their contact information for possible participation in my study. Walking away from each conference, I began to realize my experiences teaching with large numbers of men at the elementary level were distinctive. Little attention has been given to the experiences of veteran men working in

the very situation (gender balanced elementary buildings) viewed as critically important within the recruitment debate. The literature focuses almost exclusively on the experiences of token men because demographics suggest elementary buildings where men hold generous numbers are scarce.

Setting

Research in this study was conducted in the Central City School District (CCSD), a small Midwest inner-ring public school district. The Central City Elementary School (CCES) services students pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. During the 2013-2014 school year, the average classroom teachers' salary in the Central City School District was \$76,744.96. This unique elementary setting had a regular education staff consisting of 40% men, which is two times larger than the national average reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013). The staff gender of the Central City Elementary School has consistently held over 35% men for the past decade. The student population in the Central City Elementary School was 91.82 % White, 22.86 % of students were living in poverty, and 9.62% of students were identified as having disabilities. The data above provide a glimpse into both the context of the elementary environment and the conditions men participating in the study experienced.

The participants in this study came from within a school district where I have personal relationships and where I am currently teaching kindergarten. Constructivist researchers often focus on specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of their participants (Creswell, 2013). By arriving at this site, it was critically important to manage and reflect on my relationships with participants as well as my role as a researcher and teacher throughout this narrative inquiry (Horvat, 2013) A purposeful sample was chosen for this narrative case study

because it addresses gaps in the literature and offers a unique perspective into the experiences of men teaching young children.

Participants

Narrative research is best suited for capturing the stories of a single participant or a small group of participants (Creswell, 2013). In their review of the literature, Sabbe and Aelterman (2007) found the sample sizes of studies focused on gender in teaching to be very small and often centered on one or two participants. They noted that the value of this intimate research allows researchers to uncover invisible gender dynamics that shape teachers' professional environments, identities, and how stakeholders perceive them. I chose a small sample size to examine the stories of men who teach young children to allow for a deep understanding of how they negotiate identities, construct masculinities, and remain in early childhood education.

The selection of criteria for participants in this study was an iterative process that occurred while reading the literature and understanding my personal experiences. I continued to compare my personal story to the stories of other men in the literature, while working to position myself in this narrative inquiry. During my reading, I related to the experiences of men working in a feminized work context as a token and understood many of the benefits and tensions they experienced as a result of their gender. Purposeful sampling for this narrative inquiry was guided by narrow criteria. In qualitative research, purposeful sampling is used to find a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 2009). The criteria for this study focused on men who had the following experiences: at least ten years of experience teaching young children; had children of their own; and have taught in a school with other men (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I arrived at these criteria because little attention had been given to men with substantial

experience teaching young children working in gender balanced early childhood environments. Also, while men teachers with their own children at home were participants in other studies (Sargent, 2001), this research specifically highlighted and explored how becoming a parent influenced their identity and masculinities as teachers of young children.

In narrative studies, researchers must reflect on sampling and seek individuals who have stories to tell about their lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). The men participating in this study were recruited through a process designed to protect their confidentiality. Every male teacher at the Central City Elementary School received a flyer (see Appendix A) and self-adhesive envelope in their school mailbox explaining the purpose, potential risks and benefits, and requirements of the qualitative study. At the bottom of the flyer potential participants were asked to indicate whether or not they were interested in participating in the study. After marking their response, all flyers were sealed in the envelope and returned to my school mailbox. Before beginning the study, participants signed informed consent forms and were given the option of self-selecting pseudonyms for themselves.

After receiving responses from the men in the Central City Elementary Building six participants met the initial criteria of teaching ten years in early childhood education and having children of their own. These six participants offered a wide range of classroom experience, grade level assignments, and ages of their own children. One participant was quickly selected because it was important to have a teacher currently teaching in a pre-kindergarten through third grade regular education classroom. Subsequently, the participant pool became smaller when one possible participant

accepted an administration position and another was no longer teaching in the Central City School District.

Following a closer look at the participant fliers, selecting the second and third participants became more challenging. With two possible participants recently having been moved outside of the early childhood grades to upper elementary grades, concerns were raised about having to sacrifice the richness located in the traditional early childhood classroom. Ultimately the extended time in the classroom and unique preschool teaching experiences were the determining factors for including in the study a music teacher who had worked for 18 years with young children and continued to teach kindergarten through fifth graders and a fifth grade math teacher who had taught in preschool and had twelve years of experience teaching kindergarten through third grade.

Data Collection

In this study, I co-participated in creating narratives with male teachers in early childhood education. The methods chosen in a narrative inquiry must allow for the inquirer to tell his story as well as listen to the stories of participants in order to make sense of their experiences (Clandinin et al., 2007). Data were collected primarily through a series of four interviews. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, which included a flexible guide of questions (Merriam, 2009). The guides were structured to address specific topics related to the experiences of men teaching in early childhood education, but left space for participants to offer new meanings to the focus of the study (Galletta, 2013). Narrowing the central research question and subquestions led to the development of the interview guides.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using a verbatim audio transcription notation system to signal what was said and who was speaking during

interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2013). All recordings and transcriptions were saved on my personal, password-protected computer. The location of every interview was purposively selected to investigate the experiences of participants within a three-dimensional narrative landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The physical settings offered a deeper look into the professional, situated, and personal identities of participants (Day & Kington, 2008) as well as masculinities (Connell, 2005). Interview locations were carefully selected to offer insight into the professional life histories of participants.

Life history interview. The focus of the first interview was on the personal and professional experiences of participants, specifically on career choice and locating stages of their experiences (See Appendix B). In the social sciences, life history research focuses on a person's biography (Chase, 2005). Professional life history grids were developed as a guide to explore the stories and experiences of participants. Life history grids are useful graphic tools for initial interviews to build relationships with participants and lay the path for future conversations (Anderson & Brown, 1980). By filling in life history grids over a series of interviews, participants found it easier to talk about the temporality of their experiences (Riessman, 2008). The first interview took place at the residence of participants to begin a foundation of trust and rapport between researcher and participant.

Identity interview. The second interview, focused on negotiation of identity, took place in the classroom of each participant (See Appendix C). The interview explored participant values, attitudes, and experiences in the classroom. The purpose of conducting the interview in their classroom was to provide an opportunity to physically see the design of the instructional environment, gain access to available personal materials and

artifacts, and be in a physical space where participants felt comfortable talking about their identities as a teacher in early childhood education.

Masculinities interview. The third interview focused on gender and masculinities (see Appendix D). Life history research is an effective way to explore the sources of tension and change in the construction of various masculinities (Wedgwood, 2005). The interview took place at my personal residence to personalize the process and continue to foster the relationship between the participant and researcher.

Gender proportions interview. The final interview took place in the male lunchroom at the Central City Elementary School (See Appendix E). This space, already designated as informed by the construction of identity has been assigned the name “man cave.” The focus for the final interview was on investigating participants’ unique gender balanced elementary environment. This location was selected because it is a segregated place where only the men eat lunch. This last interview also offered a way to discuss emerging themes and follow-up with any questions that arose during transcription and data analysis between interviews.

Data Analysis

The analysis plan describes how I worked closely with the data, reflecting on ideas that emerged, and provided answers to my research questions (Galletta, 2013). Data analysis began before and continued throughout the data collection process with the use of analytic memo writing. The purpose of analytic memo writing is to “reflect on coding processes and choices, how the process of inquiry is taking shape, and the emergent patterns, categories, themes and concepts in one’s data” (Saldana, 2013, p. 41). Memos provided an audit trail of physical evidence during the data collection and data analysis stages (Hays & Singh, 2012). In addition, reflexive writing was routinely done in a

qualitative research journal throughout the narrative case study. Reviewing journals offered me a way to reflect on all aspects of the research journey. Merriam (2009) describes data analysis as the process researchers use to answer their research questions. Research questions were on my mind during analysis and coding of data. Research questions were linked to interview questions in Table 2 (Appendix F).

The data collection process involved moving one participant at a time through a series of four interviews. Focusing on one participant's story at a time offered a way to focus energy and attention on their unique professional life history. Following each interview, I listened to each audio recording multiple times and following transcription listened through it again. The data analysis after each interview informed subsequent interviews and drove future data collection (Creswell, 2013). Starting after the initial interview, I began a first cycle of In Vivo Coding. Saldana (2013) describes a code in qualitative inquiry as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). This process, sometimes called "literal" or "verbatim" coding, uses the actual language of participants to generate short codes (Saldana, 2013). First cycle coding involved simultaneously listening to the audio recordings and looking at transcripts with a focus on salient words and phrases participants made significant. Saldana (2013) recommends researchers look for words and phrases that stand out, involve vocal emphasis, or call for bolding and underlining. In Vivo coding was selected because it features participants' own words, which are central to constructing narratives with participants.

The second cycle of coding involved narrative analysis. In this type of analysis, "researchers collect descriptions of events and happenings and synthesize or configure

them by means of a plot into a story” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.12). The development of a story involved a recursive movement from the data to an emerging thematic plot.

Polkinghorne (1995) explains the assembly of events, or emplotment, as the to-and-fro movement from parts to whole in comprehending a text. Schutz & Luckmann, describe the process of narrative analysis as involving the arrangement of the data elements chronologically, identifying which elements are contributors to the outcome, looking for connections of cause and influence among events, and finally writing of the story (as cited in Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 18). This process simultaneously explored temporality, sociality, and place, which offered a scaffold for analysis and interpretation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The purpose of the second cycle coding was to gather the story describing how men teaching at the early childhood level remained.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) created alternative constructs when evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative studies which include credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The credibility of this study were attended to with member checks following the fourth interview with each participant. A member check was utilized to share research data with participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Clandinin (2013) describes the process of sharing tentative sketches of narrative accounts before the beginning of writing as a way to enhance the voice of participants. This study provided participants the opportunity to review and participate in organizing the preliminary stories written about their lives and experiences. Each participant received a rough draft of their individual narrative with an attached protocol (See Appendix G) of questions to discuss following their review. These moments of co-construction gave participants voice in the research process and allowed them to clarify any concerns.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the dependability of qualitative research as whether the results are consistent with the data collected. The dependability of the study will be addressed through triangulation. Triangulation uses multiple methods and sources to gather data (Merriam, 2009). The use of multiple forms of evidence offers a way to better describe findings (Hays & Singh, 2012). Triangulation helps to identify different realities and is often used within social constructivist research to ensure credibility (Deneen, 2011; Foster & Newman, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005). The multiple sources of data in this narrative inquiry included completing a series of four interviews with each participant and examination of artifacts.

Throughout this study, I viewed myself as a co-narrator and recognized narratives as socially situated interactive performances (Chase, 2005). Not all data collected was needed for telling the story; however “rich thick” descriptions have been used in writing the professional life histories of the three participants (Merriam, 2009). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe the role of qualitative researchers as providing enough description to make transferability possible. Transferability is concerned with how the findings of a study can be applied to other situations. Thick description is one of the most commonly mentioned ways to address transferability in qualitative studies (Merriam, 2009). The intention of this study involving men teaching in early childhood education was not to generalize results. The purpose was to provide a deeper understanding of how veteran men teachers in this study negotiated identity and construct masculinities in early childhood education.

Researcher’s Perspective

This study came about as a result of my personal experiences in an elementary school as a student and the last thirteen years I have spent teaching third grade, first

grade, and kindergarten in early childhood education. Growing up, I didn't have a male teacher until I reached fifth grade and I vividly remember my excitement over this moment. Without male teachers at early grades it can be challenging for men to see the early childhood grades as a career option. Growing up in a household with two parents in public education, becoming a teacher was always the occupational path planned to follow to follow.

I eventually settled on working with young children because of my experiences volunteering in my mom's kindergarten classroom. Navigating through college as one of only two male teachers in the teacher preparation program it was clear my gender would create unique opportunities for me at the primary level. Following graduation, at my first two teaching jobs, I found myself to be one of only two male teachers in each building. In my third job I arrived at a unique position where I was on an elementary staff with staff gender proportions approaching a balance. Here is a vignette from my autoethnographic pilot study describing this event:

"Man club." Arriving at a teaching position for the first time brings about a wave of emotions, even though this was my third new district in four years. Walking in to the school I was nervous, yet excited for the opportunity. The last two times I came through the front doors, for interviews, the students were lined up in the hallway waiting for their bus. It was much calmer today. The students had left for the summer the entire staff had a contracted workday to pack up their rooms before they left for their extended break. I arrived a few minutes before eight o'clock and walked into the office. The superintendent, elementary principal, and secretaries greeted me and we all walked down to the weekly staff breakfast in the cafeteria. I was introduced to the elementary faculty and sat down to eat breakfast.

After breakfast I headed down to first grade to spend the rest of the morning unpacking some of my teaching supplies from my car and organizing my classroom, only to be interrupted by faculty members coming down to personally introduce themselves. Around noon my teammates decided to take a lunch break. They both packed their lunch, but I needed to go out and grab some food. I asked them for directions to the nearest and most convenient fast food location and they provided me with directions. I began walking by myself down the main hallway towards the front doors and ran into two male teachers from the building. We had a brief conversation on the way down the hallway and our conversation continued into the main office. One of the secretaries looked up from her computer and stated, "Oh great, now you have another member for your He-Man Women Haters Club." One of the men responded chuckling, "We will have to see. We haven't recruited him yet." By this time I was interested and asked, "What is the He-Man Women Haters Club?" One of the male teachers asked, "Have you ever watched The Little Rascals?" I said, "I don't think so." The secretary said, "He is way too young." My new principal popped his head out of his office and said, "You know... Alfalfa and Buckwheat?" Embarrassed I said, "Sorry a little before my time." After the conversation ended awkwardly and I was driving down to get lunch I began thinking to myself this elementary building is unique.

The following fall I started out the school year eating lunch with my female teammates in the staff lunchroom. At first this seemed like the right thing to do. It was also a way to get to know the unfamiliar people on the staff. I started to notice when most of the time I walked into the lunch room the conversation would get quiet or the subject would be abruptly changed. Some days I would just eat lunch by myself in my own room to get work done instead of eating down in the staff lunchroom. One day in the staff

lunchroom the women were talking about being pregnant and one female teacher could see how uncomfortable I had become. She said, “Sorry about the girl talk. You know you don’t have to eat down here with the women. The men eat together upstairs.” This idea had never crossed my mind and my uncomfortable time in the staffroom would soon change.

A couple weeks later, just before Thanksgiving, the parent teacher organization bought our entire staff dinner before parent teacher conferences. The food was in the staff lunchroom and I went down to get a plate of food. I found a few of the other male teachers were in line waiting for food. We began joking around and after grabbing a full plate I turned around to see no open seats at the table in the staff lunchroom. The other men were making the way out the door and I asked, “Where are guys going to eat?” One male teacher said, “Upstairs in my room, do you want to join us?”

Following parent conferences I began eating lunch with the three men in the building on a daily basis. In our building we had male teachers in first grade, second grade, third grade, science, physical education, music, technology, and even one male teacher assistant. At my previous two school districts, aside from the principal, I was one of only two or three male teachers in the entire building. Rather than my gender making me stand out or be unique, I found myself to be just one of the many men in my new building.

The following year we had four men eating lunch together and found out we had a lot in common. We even asked our principal for permission to use a small-unused office on the second floor of our building for our male lunchroom. He gave us the green light and it was quickly labeled the man cave. We began answering the phone in our lunchroom, mancave, when someone called. When someone came to the door they had to

knock and there was an unwritten rule during lunch no women were allowed inside. Our He Man Women Haters Club transformed into the man club and we even planned our first vacation together, a three-day fishing trip the first week during summer vacation. Over the next few years and a few more male hires we began approaching a gender balance in the building. We were together on summer fishing trips, eating lunch in the man cave, standing in the back row for staff pictures, and sitting at tables during staff meetings.

During my pilot study I followed the literature describing the token experiences of male teachers in early childhood education. Turning an eye to my personal experiences I began to realize the building where I had been teaching for over ten years is precisely the situation being argued as critically important in the literature. There is a worldwide effort to recruit more men to early childhood education and many studies have looked at the types of men who enter these positions, ways to recruit more men, and even the experiences of men in the field and why they do not remain (Cushman, 2007). I realized there had been little attention on the experiences of men working in gender balanced elementary environments and the dynamics of this unique case needed to be examined through the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1996). Masculinities offered a clear vision for this study and an opportunity to make a distinct contribution to the discussion focused on men teaching young children.

Ethics and Subjectivity

Merriam (2009) suggests that ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research involves conducting the investigation in an ethical manner (p. 209). Participant privacy and protection were valued throughout this qualitative study. Following Institutional Review Board approval, recruitment began and participants were informed

of their roles and rights in the research process. During the data collection and analysis stage the research team and I were the only persons to have access to audio files and transcripts from interviews with participants to maintain confidentiality in gathering and keeping data. Pseudonyms were selected by participants before the study and used in the final write-up. Audio files and transcripts remained secured and protected throughout the research process. The data from the study will be kept secured for three years after completion for possible use in future research.

Qualitative researchers understand that the nature of the data and the analytic processes involved in their research is grounded in subjectivity (Morrow, 2005). This study began with a personal inquiry into narratives of my own experiences, which offered a way to situate my stories and clarify my personal bias and assumptions. This process of self-reflection involved an autoethnographic pilot study focused on my experiences teaching at the elementary level. I see my personal subjectivity not as a bias to be removed from my research, rather as a strength and challenge throughout this process (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The strength was the already established rapport and trust of participants having worked in the same elementary building with them for over a decade. These relationships presented challenges between my role as a teacher in their building and role as a researcher at Cleveland State. These challenges were explored within self-reflexive writing, grounding the study in the literature, and through discussion with my dissertation committee members.

CHAPTER IV

PROFESSIONAL LIFE HISTORIES

“We’re going on a bear hunt. We’re going to catch a big one.

What a beautiful day! We’re not scared.” (Rosen, 1989)

Introduction

This chapter was designed to offer an authentic look at the professional life histories of three men who chose to lead sustained careers in early childhood education. It was an opportunity to bring the reader close to their rich moments and experiences teaching young children. Data were collected during a series of four consecutive interviews and a thematic approach, based upon research questions, was used to determine which moments to share. These men were purposely selected for this study because of their prolonged experience teaching in early childhood education as well as their intention to remain in the classroom. They all find themselves in a unique position in the Central City Elementary School, given the critical mass of men teaching in their building. Frank, Jerry, and George all identify as White, heterosexual, middle class, married men with children of their own.

The narratives of Frank, Jerry, and George were co-created by participant and researcher. Each individual narrative in Chapter 4 offered an opportunity to explore the

research questions, which included the turning points for how Frank, Jerry, and George remained in the early childhood classroom; how they negotiated identity and constructed masculinities; and how the staff gender proportions influenced their experiences. The stories from their professional life histories provided rich glimpses of what Frank, Jerry, and George, teaching with other men, have experienced during their extended stay in the early childhood environment. Throughout this chapter each participant's narrative begins with a short introduction followed by their individual experiences teaching in early childhood education. Sections in each participant's unique narrative were created and labeled, with the conceptual framework in mind, to address research questions and share the unique stories from Frank, Jerry, and George's time in early childhood education.

Frank

"A told B and B told C, "I'll meet you at the top of the coconut tree."

"Whee," said D to E, F, G, "I'll beat you to the top of the coconut tree."

Chicka chicka boom boom, Will there be enough room?" (Archambault & Martin, 1989)

Frank initially began his teaching career as a high school marching band teacher, but after just four years switched to the elementary school, which he did not see as a long-term position. He quickly found a home in early childhood education and during the last seventeen years he has witnessed his early childhood school setting grow to include a large presence of men. Frank is married and has three children and five grandchildren. This year marks his twenty-second year in education and eighteenth in early childhood education.

Musical influences. Frank has always loved music. His passion for music developed through his early relationship with his grandfather, who paid for Frank's

accordion lessons when he was five, and later his piano lessons. His parents continued to support his interest in music, which later led him to find his niche in high school. He flourished in the jazz band and the marching band and even began showing an interest in writing shows, which his band director nurtured. When Frank began thinking about life in college his high school band director, along with his mom and dad, assisted him with the process of finding a good fit. Similar to high school, Frank ended up attending a large college and decided on teaching music.

I think it was the personal connection I had with my high school band director. I mean we were close. After graduation I was at his house, we went fishing together. We just had a nice relationship. I appreciated what he did for me and I thought, “I want to be that. I want to do that. That’s what I want to do. I want to be that person for somebody else.” He showed me how excellent music was and I loved it from him so I wanted to be that guy.

Frank remembers purposely finishing his college experience during the fall quarter because of his interest in doing a marching band teaching experience. Following graduation he moved back home and spent the spring substitute teaching while looking for a full-time high school position. Frank graduated with a K-12 music education degree and always envisioned himself teaching at the high school level despite being required to take elementary school general music methods.

Beginning of the end. The very next fall Frank was hired by the Central City School District as the middle school and high school marching band and jazz band director responsible for teaching an occasional elementary general music class.

I remember thinking when I got the job... I walked into the classroom and there weren’t even kids in there yet, and I just walked in and I felt like I was the king...

I felt like I was going to be the man. I'm just going to be great. This band is going to shine. This is going to be fantastic. I'm just going to come in and be friends with everybody, the kids are going to love me. The administrators are going to love me. The parents are going to love me. That was the thought process. It was all positive, good things and as the year went on I realized that wasn't the case.

Frank had been hired to a position where the former band director who retired was well loved by the high school students. His students were still very loyal to their recently retired teacher and when he showed up for football games Frank found himself fighting for their attention. He also found himself struggling with the fact that despite his own rigorous musical background and abilities the students at this small high school were not at the level he expected from them, which quickly shifted his role from "master of music" to tutoring the basics. His first three years the process of adjusting to "small school politics" was very confusing. Frank found it difficult adapting to sharing his band students with other fall sports like football, soccer, and volleyball because their attention was not solely on being a musician like his had been growing up. It was also challenging to finish a high school band class and only have a couple minutes to sprint across the parking lot to the elementary school. He often arrived at these few weekly elementary classes late and unprepared because he and the other teachers in the music department had no common time for coordinating shared elementary lesson plan responsibilities.

At the beginning of Frank's fourth year his teaching assignment changed because of a rearranging of music department teachers. He found himself assigned to not only middle school and high school band, but choir as well. His passion had always been music and he was immediately uncomfortable with the new middle school and high school choir classes since his K-12 music certification focus had been instrumental rather

than vocal. Only a few months later his career trajectory would take a dramatic turn. The elementary general music teacher took a position in another school district and Frank approached the administration with his own recommendation to switch him over to the vacant early childhood position. He was comfortable with the idea of the early childhood position because of his weekly experiences working with young students, but deep down he was trying to escape having to lead the choir.

It wasn't my priority, because my priority was I've got to get this show together for the football game on Friday. I was the middle school/high school guy, elementary school was the, this sounds cold, but... may as well have been study hall duty.

After a successful hiring search the administration Frank recalls being sent over to the kindergarten through fifth grade general music position. In the first three years of middle school and high school band Frank adjusted to the surprising amount of individual attention his students needed after school. With so many of his older students at basic playing levels he realized the nurturing aspect of teaching students with limited musical abilities made the transition to elementary school much easier. By winter break, Frank was comfortable teaching at the elementary level, but was already planning his way out and began looking for high school jazz and marching band teaching opportunities.

Later that spring, after settling in full-time at the elementary level, Frank remembers a conversation he had at dinner with his wife.

You know something, this elementary school gig is sweet. I like it. I love the kids. There is no drama with the kids. There is no middle school/high school drama. They come bouncing down the hallway in a great mood, happy to see me and I am happy to see them. I've found heaven. You know. Honest to God.

As a result of his move to the elementary level Frank saw his stress level calmed down and his entire attitude and demeanor had shifted. The combination of having focused responsibilities at one building and over time the early positive elementary teaching experiences with young students led him to appreciate his new position and put a stop to his search for another job. Although he initially fell into the elementary general music teaching position, with time Frank found a home working with young children at the Central City Elementary School.

Embracing early childhood. Since arriving at the elementary building during the middle of his fourth year, Frank has remained in place for eighteen years teaching general music to kindergarten through fifth grade students. Compared to his secondary experiences he has noticed more of a “jolly aura” about the elementary building and views it as a much more happier place to work. Frank describes the Central City Elementary School as being small in size with “good kids, good families, and good teachers.” He sees himself as positioned in a positive situation because he gets along well with the close, friendly, and supportive staff. He personally receives support from the PTO and Music Boosters throughout the year with concerts and performances. Due to the small size of the community, Frank believes parents quickly become aware of teacher reputations in the classroom. His move highlighted a change from teaching specific subject matter at the middle and high school to more of a focus on teaching individual students at the elementary level.

When Frank arrived full-time to the elementary building he was worried about students being afraid of coming up to his room because of his over six foot tall height and

facial hair. He appreciated working with the young students sharing because of their attitudes.

What helped me love elementary was that I could teach kids music and they were like sponges. If I was excited about it they wanted to learn it. In high school and middle school I loved it, I was teaching it, but they were middle school and high school kids and they had other interests and they would learn it, but it wasn't the same.

He became engulfed in the excitement of his young students attempting musical activities for the first time. Frank's students loved to learn music and showed their excitement by giving him hugs, asking him to sing the songs over and over again, and even telling him he was their favorite teacher. He has always encouraged and welcomed physical contact (high fives, fist bumps, hugs) with students and never feared it at all.

If they want to give you a hug it is because they need that hug. So I give it back to them, always, open arms, all the time, every time. I don't know, I'm sure people have fear of that sometimes, like oh I'd never touch a kid because then they're going to say this or that. I just, maybe its ignorance, but I just, I don't think that way, and I don't worry about that because my intentions are not anything other than just I'm just trying to be a nurturing person. Now I am older so I can I fall into that grandpa category now. So I don't know, does that make it better or worse?

Looking back, Frank considers the warm and positive student reactions just one part of why he enjoyed teaching at the elementary level.

Stress free sanctuary. With Frank not being a classroom teacher he sometimes feels out of the loop at building meetings with regards to the district- and state-wide

policies impacting classroom teachers, such as high-stakes testing and value added growth assessments coming down from the State Department of Education. Although he has moments of interest on these topics he realizes it is nice to be mostly shielded from this greater accountability movement. Frank is not involved with adopting new textbooks or building wide intervention efforts, but he does see it as raising the stress level of students and fellow teachers by increasing the amount expected from them.

Kids are being pushed from one thing to the next and its hurry up and get there because we only have this much time to do it and when that's done no time to unwind, no time to talk. They need to unwind.

From his vantage point teachers are asking students to do things adults are not even asked to do in their daily schedules. Frank doesn't feel any of the pressure from testing, but does make an effort to work with other teachers in the building to incorporate core academic skills into his music lessons. This collaboration is based on his desire for wanting his students to succeed. He views music as an opportunity to integrate every subject in school (math, language, reading, science). Since Frank is not teaching an academic subject during the current high-stakes culture in primary education, he considers it an easier path to creating a fun and carefree learning environment for students arriving in his music class. When students arrive for his music class there are no desks just a large carpet area in front of the piano. Frank's lessons are designed to include short instructional moments followed by frequent movement and center time for working independently with instruments. For fifty minutes five times a month he is able to remove some of the stress they are experiencing during their elementary educational journey

Classroom teachers have state mandated academic tests, while Frank has performances, which he calls "the standardized test of the music world." His brain is

always focused towards his next grade level performance occurring throughout the entire school year calendar.

You want the kids to do well and you will do your lessons and you will make your lessons and you will polish your lessons and you will allow the students to explore it and then it gets close to the concert and none of that matters anymore. We're learning this song and if you're not doing it by the notes I am going to show you how it goes. You just listen and sing.

With seventeen years of delivering yearly kindergarten through fifth grade performances Frank continues to be amazed at how good students feel about themselves after a successful musical performance.

They just have a different aura about them, they're very happy and excited and I like that. Kids don't hide that kind of excitement real well. They just let it all out. I watch that and I think, "That's why we do this. That's why this is happening like this. That's the feeling. That's what I want them to have. I want them to have that, that love and that memory of doing something great." ...And there are moments like that every year of working towards a performance, doing a performance, and having a good feeling about a performance. It lets them know hard work pays off.

Consistent positive reactions from teachers, administrators and parents to these performances and recitals offer Frank validation for his work at the primary level. It lets him know that what he is doing is being noticed and truly matters. Despite the current culture in early childhood education Frank is steadfast in the importance of maintaining the elementary lifestyle, which includes allowing students to enjoy their early experiences through activities such as recess, an assembly, performances, or field trips.

New role, new identity. It wasn't an immediate feeling, but as time passed teaching at the elementary Frank came to realize, "I'm not a musician anymore." When he was teaching at the high school level working on a jazz chart or writing challenging marching band parts the musical portion of him was being satisfied. His role required him to play challenging pieces of music for students on a daily basis. His skill as a musician was a central part of his identity in his role as an educator. At the elementary level his upper level musical skills were collecting dust.

I know for sure that happened when we had our high school alumni reunion when my band director that got me into teaching retired. So they brought together all these alumnus to do a jazz band thing and I'm, I was struggling like hell through those charts.

Frank went from reading, writing and playing high-level music at the high school to playing the same three chords on the piano for a music lesson at the elementary. The worst moments occurred when he began making mistakes on these simple pieces, which led him to experience a "whirlwind of emotions" and wonder, "what had happened to me? I should be able to do this."

One big complaint Frank mentioned is just when his elementary students, in fifth grade, are starting to become interested in music and digging in on their own they are leaving for the middle school to develop relationships with their secondary teachers. After six consecutive years of working with young students when Frank loses them it can be difficult.

Many kids, like myself included, will build a lasting, life-long relationship with a teacher or their music teacher. And I think, "well, I don't get that. They're done

with me.” Now I’ll see them in middle school and high school. And a lot of kids will say hi, but I think, I’m not a part of that, I’m not a part of their lives anymore. Frank adjusted to satisfying his musical feelings by giving lessons to older students after school, lending out jazz tapes and song books to interested students, and volunteering to play with the high school jazz band. Frank continues to appreciate his opportunities to collaborate with older students and admits to not being the musician he once was, but likes the musician he is today.

Fun and friendly. Across his experiences at the secondary and elementary level Frank uses the word “fun” to describe himself as a teacher. In the classroom he focuses on providing more than just musical help to his students. He sees himself as “parental” and understanding of individual student’s situations.

I try to give them life help in addition to just music help. Can they play this beat on the drum? Can they play this pattern? Yes, but if there is one crying because he got into an argument with his friend I don’t say, “Save that stuff for after class.” You deal with it. I try to be fair. I try to be nice. I want to be a teacher that the kids like. I want to come through the door excited to be in here because they like me and I think liking me is going to help them like the subject. So I try to be a likeable, friendly, fun person and teacher.

Frank describes treating students as people, listening to them, and showing interest in their interests to build strong relationships with them, which leads them to treat him almost as a parent. He views these connections as an opportunity to learn from the students themselves.

I’ll be perfectly honest with you I don’t try to develop a passion for music within students, it seems to just happen. I think music does that. My passion helps them

be passionate about it. I'm passionate about it so they see that. So I think they just absorb that love of music from my love of music. I don't have any tricks to it. I just love it.

Having students for six years at the elementary level Frank feels as though the way he treats students has allowed him to become a meaningful part of their lives.

Frank believes his daily excitement and energy offers him a way to bring something different to the table at the elementary level. When parents come in for open house he often gets surprised reactions from parents about the appearance of his classroom. His open floor plan offers students musical areas with electric keyboards, computers, and instruments. Parents are amazed to see the variety of musical instruments and opportunities their children can explore and experience in his room. His classroom design aligns with his teaching philosophy of wanting students to "experience music and have an appreciation for it throughout their whole lives." Frank delivers instruction with lots of daily movement and presents students different kinds of music in many ways "so every student can find their way to allow music to be a part of their life." Frank has always wanted his students to enjoy having him in class and his passionate energy and attitude allow him to model characteristics to excite his young students. While a part of this inspiration is internal, Frank also shares how he pulls some from the other male teachers at the Central City Elementary School.

Mancave, manclub, mancation. When Frank started at the elementary he recalls there were only a few other male teachers in the building. He became close friends with one specific male teacher because they were about the same age and shared many of the same hobbies and interests. It was not that the two of them were against eating in the lunchroom with all the female teachers, but they decided to eat lunch together where they

did not have to worry about what anybody else was hearing. It did not happen overnight, but through the years two men eating together in the back of Frank's classroom grew into four and eventually with new hires.

It got to the point where we just needed another space to eat because there were so many guys in the building. Once it became known that we were eating together that lure of the mancave kind of came about. I don't even know who called it that initially or who made that up. My guess would be the secretary in the office. She made some joke about it calling us the He Man Women Haters Club from the Little Rascals. So word travels then somebody hears that and then everyone start calling us the manclub.

Frank shares conversations in the mancave at lunch range from Fantasy Football and video games to family life at home and students at school. He recalls a moment at lunch where he was getting frustrated after a difficult morning in his music class.

You know I get a lot of inspiration from the guys with kids that just drive me crazy and make me want to go nuts. I'm telling a story about a student driving me crazy and someone will just flat come out and say, "I love that kid! I love that kid." And I'll think, "Yeah, I should love that kid too. (*laughing*) I should love that kid too. Why? What am I complaining about? This is, he's just, he's a great kid. He's a great kid."

His lunch conversations were only the beginning as Frank and the men in the building developed strong working relationships inside and outside the elementary building.

Soon, Frank remembers discussions about planning a fishing trip during summer vacation began to dominate lunch conversations. Frank's first fishing trip, called "mancation" involved five male teachers traveling ten hours for a three day fishing trip.

This summer men in the building are anticipating their tenth “mancation” fishing trip. He describes these trips as allowing the male teachers in the elementary building to get to know each other very well and offer “big bonding moments.” In addition to these trips Frank hosts events at his house throughout the year for the male teachers in his building.

I know this sounds dumb, I like to organize and plan things for the guys. I’m excited about having the football game over here. I like having the clambake. I just like getting together with buddies.

Frank believes spending more time together outside of school has provided the foundation for the male elementary teachers at his building to get competitive in games and in activities.

Since Frank arrived at the elementary building the number of male teachers has doubled in size. He is not sure how it got to a point where so many men were in the highly feminized position of elementary teacher.

That’s awesome there’s so many guys at Central City Elementary Building. It’s good for the kids. And I think maybe it’s just because that’s creating a balance. I think it’s good for the reason the more men you have the more diversity of men you have. The more kind of men you have, but it shouldn’t be overpowered by men. It should be a good balance.

He has heard many parents tell him it is nice to have so many male teachers in the building because their child needs a male role model, while the female teachers in the building have maintained a fun and playful attitude about the growing presence of men. His female principal has even weighed in telling him, after an interview process, that she is going to be the envy of all her friends because she has the only all male specials team in an elementary school in the state.

Silent competition. Although teachers, parents, and administrators have welcomed the benefits of having more men at the elementary level it has also created some unintended consequences. At times, being just one of the males teaching in the Central City Elementary Building, Frank finds himself in a silent, non-aggressive competition with the other men, although he has never felt as if he is in in competition at all with the female classroom or fine arts teachers. In a small building, where he is the only elementary music teacher, Frank also finds himself in a lonely position following lunch conversations in the mancave.

After a horrible morning, maybe not horrible, but in my head it's horrible. I got so agitated with the kids. I was ready to give up. I was mad at this kid or whatever and I get the feeling of a bad feeling then I'll listen to some of the guys communicate and I'll think, "Why am I? I shouldn't be feeling like this, look at these two guys, they're working together. They have each other's backs." Then I'll get the, "I don't have anybody to have my back, like I am the only one in the music department so I'll get like that." There's like a jealousy that happens, but its not, it doesn't make me want to lash out, it's again, it's just like, "Alright I'm going to, how am I going to turn what I have into that? How am I going to use that? How am I going to make myself better with that?" So that, I think, kid wise that's the kind of competition that exists. I think we all want that.

Frank not only wants students and parents to like him, he wants everybody to like him. When he is walking down the hallway and hears a student say, "I love Mr. Smith's class," he begins thinking about how he is going to make the student love his own class. Frank's under the radar competition is linked to how he sees himself and how students view him compared to the other male teachers in the building. When Frank has moments

like these (wondering how he is going to make school great for his students) he views it as a big benefit to his students.

I mean it's not a competition where I feel like I have to win, it's not, it isn't even a win or lose thing. It's just more like a motivational competition to help you be the best you can be. That's what I get out of that, those feelings. I want to make myself the best I can be so I feel like I am up there with the rest of my colleagues.

Although Frank never speaks to the other male teachers about this competition his close relationships, inside and outside of school, have allowed him to share stories and feel comfortable comparing himself to the other male teachers in his building.

Special opportunities. Frank admits that he and the other men teaching at his elementary building have not only formed a close social network among each other, but also with male administrators and the technology department. Frank remembers them stopping by the mancave to share a dirty joke or some inappropriate advice like “never trust a fart, never pass a bathroom, and never waste a hard on.” Frank was never pressured to move into administration by his male administrators but remembers some of his interactions with them.

He didn't say principal he said leader. I think the time he really pushed that on me was after the first field day when I took over student council and I organized the field day. He was never one to give praise. If you did something good he would tell you. After that first field day for a couple of days he kept coming back up to me going, “I just have to tell you again that was the best event I've ever seen at the school in terms of everybody working together. Everybody in this building followed you and did exactly what you asked them to do and that doesn't happen because you asked them it's because they respect you and they like you. They'll

do for you what you ask them because you have their respect.” He goes, “you’d be a great leader. You’d be a great leader.” He didn’t say administrator or principal. He just said, “leader.”

Emphasis from his principal confirmed Frank’s leadership qualities and strengthened his standing in the building. Although his principal may have never pressured him into thinking about leaving for an administration, his dad, who had a friend that retired as a teacher and was rehired as an administrator, was lobbying Frank to go back to school to get his principal license because of the opportunity for more money. His response to his dad was the same as it would have been had his principal pressed him on the issue, “I just don’t have any interest in it.”

These close relationships have allowed the men in the building to carve out a classroom, separate from the female staff, where they can eat lunch in gendered solitude. Frank is not sure if their “mancave” should be considered special treatment, but recently his two new administrators have continued to maintain this sacred space even when teaching assistants needed office space. Frank concedes his male eating space has allowed him to tap into his friendship bond and easily borrow technology from the men who have laptop carts in their classrooms. This camaraderie has aided his ability to gain access to resources in the building.

Frank shares it is hard not to notice teacher gender in a building with so many men working at different grade levels. He is familiar with the idea of the male role model.

If I’m thinking you know typical guy, what do you think? You think strong, you think commanding, not necessarily demanding, but you know like almost like not the boss role, but that’s kind of what pops into my head and then women being

more sensitive and coddling and nurturing. So I guess a male role model just maybe a little bit more firm.

In the past, Frank was asked by the school psychologist to work with students in the morning that didn't have a male role model in their lives. These students either had no dad or older brothers at home or they didn't enjoy school and were not having a positive educational experience. In this role Frank volunteered his planning time once or twice a week for 30 minutes and tried to become friends with these students. He would spend one on one time with the boys, talk with them about any issues they were having, find out their interests, and even do school work.

Frank recalls that the school guidance counselor and school psychologist used this one on one male role model pilot project to develop an after school program for fourth grade boys. The program was designed for the entire male staff (teachers and principal) to mentor fourth graders, while their parents received support from guest speakers on how to raise challenging boys. The periodic events were planned all around the area at bowling alleys, indoor and outdoor gaming areas, and parks. Frank remembers the program being marketed to him as a positive male role opportunity; however, his definition of male role model is not always aligned with the masculinities he constructs.

Masculinities. When he was growing up, Frank's parents were great role models and nurturing people. His dad was very patient and even now that Frank is in his mid-forties they do not swear around each other, even though his mom "swears like a truck driver." He describes his dad as a "gentle, laid back, nice guy." At the center of Frank's parenting philosophy are qualities like being patient, supportive, and loving to his kids. When his daughter reached school age he noticed a change.

That was making me a better teacher. I just think once I had, once she was there I felt like I was able to do it a little bit more easily. I understood the kids better at that age, and then, you know, she got a little older then boom first grandkid comes around, and second grandkid, so I'm kind of, I'm surrounded by a lot of the age kids that I teach. So I think that helps me stay current. It drives me crazy a little bit sometimes too, like when I come home from work and they're all here.

He believes there is a reciprocal relationship between being a parent and an early childhood music teacher. Both roles have helped him develop more patience at home and school. He believes he is able to relate to his students and connect with them better and with so many personalities entering his classroom every year it has helped him grow to love all of his students, even the challenging ones.

When the students start at the elementary building in kindergarten and go to fifth grade Frank has the privilege of knowing his students for six years. He recalls a time where he would tell his elementary students in class, "I've known some of you longer than I've known my own daughter." Being the only male in his house surrounded at home with a wife and three daughters he points out that only the cat has the same gender. He feels as though he has been overtaken by women and jokingly suggests he is turning into one.

Thinking about the last twelve years at the elementary level Frank believes other staff members and parents view him having a reputation as a "softer male role model."

It just seems like it's more productive than being aggressive or being, bully's not the right word either, but being intimidating. Intimidating is probably the best word to use for that, just some form of intimidation. Whether it's raising your voice or never smiling or just being super stern. That scaring wasn't getting the

desired result, but the more nurturing techniques got a more positive response. I still have moments where I am getting mad and I have to dial it back because it is not effective.

From all his challenging moments as a parent and as a teacher Frank has seen that it does not, over the long run, help you to react that way. Time at home with his own children and moments in class raising his voice around young students have mellowed his interactions in both settings. Changing from yelling across a high school football field at 60 students during marching band practice to spending time with young students in an elementary music classroom was just the beginning of relaxing Frank's attitude. In addition it has also helped that his elementary music class is currently a much less stressful place than the regular classroom setting.

I think my subject doesn't help me to be that way either because what I try to get out of the kids is participation. I want them to be involved in music. They need to sing. They need to move. They need to dance and they need to be not free of inhibition, but they need to be relaxed and they need to be comfortable and not worried about doing something wrong or not worried about what somebody else like being nervous about what somebody else is thinking about them. I don't want them to be self-conscious. So that it doesn't work if I'm always on them or yelling at them.

Learning from his own nurturing parents as well as his wife and daughter, Frank describes absorbing both the good and bad experiences, added them to his base of knowledge, and adjusting his own masculinities to a more nurturing place.

Frank is in the unique position at the elementary building because he works with teachers at every grade level. Aside from his contact with male teachers at lunch in the

mancave, he also has their students visit his music room two times a week. In addition, his daughter has passed through the building, kindergarten through fifth grade, and currently his granddaughter and grandson are making their way through the elementary. He hears about male teachers from student conversations in his music room and even has experiences with them at parent teacher conferences. Thinking of the other male teachers in the building Frank was been able to compare their masculinities to his own based on his experiences as a parent and teacher in the building. He has seen the men teaching in the building range from being structured, strict, and tough to caring and nurturing. While Frank has developed his own masculinities over time he has witnessed first hand some of the male teachers in the building change as well. He thinks being surrounded by a range of masculinities, specifically by men with more of a nurturing approach, have affected his moments working with young students. One specific interaction with a male teacher in his building jumps out.

It reaffirms it. He gets the kids to work for him. And I never see him have to be you know. He doesn't intimidate. He does not do that with intimidation. You can tell he loves the kids and the kids love him. It's a good working relationship. And that reassures it for me. I am going to get more out of these kids by being nurturing to them than I am going to be intimidating. I know in my own experience I get more out of the kids from nurturing that I do from sternness.

Frank realizes his strong relationships with the other men teaching in the building have positively influenced the way he has constructed his own masculinities.

Outside of his elementary school setting, Frank has moments where his masculinity is questioned because of his role teaching young children music. When he gets together with his high school buddies they often joke he is "gay by proxy" just

because he is an elementary school music teacher. When Frank attends the state music educator's conference he often finds himself surrounded by less stereotypically male music teachers. He doesn't know if they are gay, but he compares himself to these other men.

I don't think I'm feminine, I think I'm, you know, maybe I'm not intimidating or macho or butch, but I try to be like you know, I don't think I'm, I don't think I project the image of, of being gay. I don't know if that is correct to say. I feel bad saying it.

All of these interactions have made Frank realize he has found a comfortable place back at school with his male teaching friends who also identify as White, middle class, heterosexual married men with children of their own.

Turning points, revitalization, and staying put. Looking back over his prolonged career Frank identified a personal and a professional turning point when he decided to remain in the early childhood education music classroom. The personal turning point centered on him falling in love with life at the elementary school. His passion switched from being a musician to focusing on all the talents needed to meet the musical needs of young students at the elementary level.

Since his identity as an educator had changed he made an important professional decision when he returned to complete his graduate degree. Originally when he went back to take classes he was focused on music education and after one semester of music theory and history classes he quickly realized the content he used to be passionate about at the secondary level was not applicable to what he was doing with primary students. Near the end of the semester he was going to drop out of the program and received some

advice from a woman in his class to switch his focus to music technology. After a little research he made the change and graduated with a degree in instructional technology.

I figured I'd be teaching music forever, for the rest of my life. I mean I love it, but for the first time it was a possibility like, "holy mackerel, there's another option, it's technology. I'm pretty good at it. I'm involved with it at our school in my job. People count on me. People call me. They call me before they call the technology guy." Now I'm starting to see possibilities though, not just taking over for somebody, but expanding like here's what we should be doing. I'm having these ideas, so it's bubbling.

After teaching the same content area for fifteen years he realized about at the half way point of his career a technology position would give him a fresh start to still work with young students just in a different way. Thinking about the idea and discussing it with his wife Frank made the decision that if the technology job at his elementary building came open he would apply for it. The position became vacant due to a retirement, but it was never posted because of a cost saving initiative by the district. Frank was not upset, but had gotten excited about the possibility of creating the same musical excitement in a technology role.

Although there was no change in Frank's teaching position, all the excitement of flirting with using his music technology degree ended up impacting his elementary music classroom. The following year he began annually attending the state music conference.

The fireworks started to go off again. It wasn't that I was stale in music, it was just the idea of doing something different excited me. I felt an excitement that I haven't felt in a while. So once that didn't happen I started going to the state conference again and learning fresh new ideas. I realized that as something that

was very good, not only for the kids because I'm bringing them fresh and current things, but it was good for me. It revitalized me. So my continuing goal is to just not be stale.

Frank recognizes this entire sequence of events rejuvenated him as an elementary school teacher and instead of counting down the years until he is able to retire he felt fresh and excited. Recently, he has also made an effort to stay physically fit because in his mid-forties he is at a point in his career where it has been difficult to jump and hop around on one foot and play active games with his young students. Looking to the future he does worry about his ability to sing, dance, and constantly move during daily lessons into his sixties, but his personal and professional adjustments indicate Frank intends for it to conclude with him teaching elementary music.

Frank is amazed that he has spent the last 18 years teaching at the elementary level. He believes he has remained in place because he enjoys the place in which he works, the people with whom he works, and the students. He still loves to teach music and he is reminded of that every time he has an in-service day full of meetings, realizing the job is not really the same unless he is interacting with students and seeing them smile. Frank credits the close relationships with male colleagues for keeping him so happy at school.

I never thought about leaving that school district because I just like, like the people I work with. You know. And kids, that's certainly part of it, but I would put the people I work with over the kids. Because kids are, I think I'd love kids anywhere, I don't know if I'd love people I'd work with everywhere.

He shares sitting down in the lunchroom, with his male teaching friends, can erase a bad morning at the elementary building and “cleanses his spirit.” Knowing he is coming to work to see his friends makes it a little bit easier to get out of bed on a difficult morning.

Conclusion. Today, Frank describes himself as lucky to have found a job right out of college, lucky to be teaching at the elementary level, and lucky to be working at a supportive building with his friends. He remembers the change from high school to elementary as a low point in his career, but looking back now sees it as a blessing in disguise. Frank changed from being a musician instructing students to a nurturing role model interested in developing the whole child at the elementary level. This change impacted his educational philosophy and pedagogical decisions, which were factors in the turning points for him remaining at the primary level. He identified being surrounded by a multitude of men at his elementary building as heavily influencing not only his decision to remain teaching young children, but also his nurturing approach. Frank believes having his own children and now grandchildren gives him perspective, keeps him young, and reminds him how much he enjoys what he is doing. He recognizes it has revitalized his classroom as well as his intentions of staying at the elementary level for the long haul.

Jerry

“Why did you do all this for me?” he asked.

“I don’t deserve it. I’ve never done anything for you.”

“You have been my friend,” replied Charlotte.

“That in itself is a tremendous thing.” (White, 1952)

Before arriving in early childhood education Jerry spent time as a landscaper and construction worker. After getting married he followed his wife across the country while she finished a doctoral degree and established her career. Over time their family grew to

include three children. Jerry got his start as a pre-kindergarten teacher and eventually landed in early childhood education where he has spent the last fourteen years teaching second grade through fifth grade.

Unlikely path and unusual experiences. Beginning at an early age and all the way up through high school, Jerry was always babysitting kids in his local community. These opportunities started with parents going out to dinner or a movie and returning to find Jerry having effectively handled the responsibility of being alone with their children. After a couple of these first baby-sitting sessions word spread and suddenly his phone was constantly ringing. Eventually he found himself baby-sitting kids for entire weekends, which involved sleeping at their house, cooking three meals and even taking care of the pets while their parents were out of town. Despite all of these moments Jerry spent around children it did not initially lead him to pursue a career involving them.

When he left for a state college, Jerry began as a business major interested in becoming a hotel or restaurant manager because of a part time job at a local restaurant in high school.

So I was a business major for 4 years, but I did not graduate. I didn't have enough credits. And my grade point average was really, really low. Because I didn't want... I wasn't going to classes. I didn't know what I was doing. Going to college I had no clue what I wanted to do. So it showed with my attendance in class and any kind of work I was doing, it was crap. I wasn't doing anything. And I knew I didn't want to become a business major especially when I took Economics 101. So I was like, "This is terrible. (*laughing*) This is not what I want to be. I can't see myself being in business ever."

During his time in college Jerry also worked as a landscaper eventually climbing the ladder up to a leadership role running his own crew. While taking classes and searching for a career direction he fell in love with a girl who was extremely focused and on a fast track with her own aspirations. When she finished her degree they left and moved together to a southern state. She enrolled in a PhD program and Jerry began working construction for his future brother-in-law, making \$38 per hour thinking, “There was nothing else I’d rather be doing.” Later, after getting married, Jerry decided to pass up the money and the possibility for promotion in construction because he and his wife were nearly ready to start a family.

In a new state, Jerry decided once again to try landscaping and was hired right away. He was put on a crew and on his first day remembers digging into red clay thinking, “this is insane.” Jerry knew right away after that first week of work as a landscaper it was not the right place for him. He began looking for another job in the newspaper and found an interesting advertisement for a four-hour class required to become a pre-kindergarten teacher. He registered for the certification class.

It was a joke. It was a 2-year license that you got, but you got it in 4 hours.

(laughing) It was just a joke. Basically a first aid course and a couple of tidbits on what you’re going to be experiencing as a Pre-K teacher. That was it. And then you got your little piece of paper and then you could present that. It gave you some credibility going in to a center. You didn’t necessarily have to have it, but I felt like, especially being a male, it might help. You know get my feet in the door. I knew I wanted to become a teacher, but I knew I didn’t have the degree to do it. So this was my way to get in front of a classroom... to start out in a classroom. So that was what kind of drove me towards it.

There was a large demand for teachers because his state began offering a universal Pre-K Program using lottery money. Following his class Jerry was quickly offered a job, but because of the high demand decided to play the field and visit three different locations to find the best fit. During his search he found a location he “immediately fell in love with” and accepted a position there. He was given his own classroom and a substantial sum of money to order the instructional materials he wanted.

Throughout Jerry’s time as a landscaper and construction worker he found himself surrounded entirely by men, but this was not the case arriving at his new position. He immediately realized his male gender made him stand out in his Pre-Kindergarten position. Upon his arrival both his sexual orientation and intentions with young children were questioned. This led to many parents wanting their children pulled out of his classroom.

Twelve people drop right out of my class. Parents pulled them out because there was a male coming into a Pre-K Program. [Parents thought] “I don’t want my child learning from this guy.” And you know it was ok. The center was like, “Ok that’s fine. We’ve got a waiting list anyway. So we’ll just put the other kids in.” Word got out I was pretty good at what I was doing and all those people wanted back in. And the director came and said, “It’s up to you. They pulled out for the reason... you’re a guy. If you want them back in we’ll make room for them, but you know it’s all up to you.” And I was like, “Let them back in they were good kids.” And it made me feel good, you know, I had a good feeling about that. It was a satisfaction that I had broken the community to the point where they were like ok this guy is really here for our kids. And he’s going to do a good job. It didn’t take long.

Jerry's motives for working with young children were scrutinized and parents could not understand why a male teacher would want to work for such a small sum of money with young students. His describes his male gender immediately raising red flags for some parents, but over the next three years working at the Pre-Kindergarten school he remembers settling in and founding a comfortable place.

Without any early childhood education training Jerry relied upon two female mentors he could tell were quality teachers. He designed many of his classroom activities based on what they were doing in their rooms, but in his own unique way.

I was doing centers at that time. I had kids rotating doing the whole thing. I mean it was the only thing that would work. It was planned chaos, but it was 4 year olds running around. I was stationed in the middle of the room and we were doing a math lesson. And then there were kids over here hammering. You know I bought real tools. They had saws that were real. I mean I could get one of out of my garage. And I had real hammers. I'm like, "Oh my gosh, this is great. It's going to be noisy in here, but who cares I've got my own little building" and so I was like, "we can make as much noise as we want."

Many of Jerry's first moments in his own classroom with young students involved trial and error. Walking into a sink or swim situation he quickly learned setting up structure was a key ingredient to being successful and managing behaviors. Jerry believes the hands on materials he was able to order for his room made his daily activities interesting, while passing out stickers helped him survive naptime.

Despite gaining the trust of the parents and having them rave about him in the community, Jerry still felt as though he needed to be careful because he did not have his degree yet.

Knowing that one step of somebody seeing something they thought they saw could just derail me for the rest of my career and I would never become a teacher scared the crap out of me. The case in point was when a mom came in and I was ahhh... a child had had an accident in the bathroom and needed to be changed. And the door... I had an assistant... the door was open the assistant was out of sight. So in comes this mom and I'm sitting there in the bathroom on my hands and knees, you know, cleaning up a child who had an accident and I looked at her face as she walked in and I could just see the confusion... the disbelief. "What's going on? What's happening? What am I seeing?" It was actually during naptime. So all the other, all the lights were out. Kids were all lying down. What's this guy doing? It was just that disbelief at first and you know that to me was a scary situation. And I just kept cleaning up the child. And she knew at that point I think once the smell hit her (*laughing*) she knew what was really going on.

Over time Jerry's gender was gradually accepted at his Pre-Kindergarten school. After three years in his position Jerry realized, "this was my real love...I want to become a teacher and I want to be teaching the little kids." He enjoyed the Pre-Kindergarten environment and soon found himself on a path to getting his teaching degree.

He enrolled at a local community college and began taking classes to become a licensed teacher. In the middle of this degree his wife got a job opportunity in a large urban city in the Midwest and Jerry moved again. At their next stop they welcomed a son to their family and Jerry became a stay at home dad during the day and student at night. Now on his third college, Jerry was finally able to finish up his education degree and was certified to teach Kindergarten through 8th grade. During the last six months of his student teaching experience his wife was offered a new, more prestigious position near

where she grew up. At the same time Jerry finished up his student teaching experience and was offered a job, but turned it down because his family was moving again.

Arriving in a new city, with a month left in the public school year, Jerry began looking for opportunities to substitute teach and possibly find a full-time teaching position. He received a call about a teaching assistant position at the Central City Elementary School supporting teachers and students in Kindergarten and 5th grade. Jerry accepted the teaching assistant position and started the following fall.

Try out. Jerry describes the Central City School District as a “small school district where you get to know everybody.” During his first year as a teaching assistant he split his time between the youngest and oldest grades in the elementary building supporting teachers and working individually with struggling students. He shared an office with three female teaching assistants and one male teaching assistant. Early in the year they would all learn two classroom teachers would be retiring at the end of the school year so Jerry viewed his first year as a try out for a full-time teaching position.

All year the teaching assistants were in a competition to please the teachers at each grade level because their principal told them a big piece of their evaluations was based on the classroom teacher feedback. The competition reached its peak in the spring at the interviews and Jerry remembers the atmosphere getting cold in their teaching assistant room. During the first round of interviews Jerry was the first one to answer questions for the committee. Following his interview he came out and willingly communicated everything he was asked with all three teaching assistants who were very thankful for the information. All four were called back for a second interview and this time one of the female teaching assistants went first. She came out and did not share any

details about the questions she was asked. Jerry was shocked and remembers feeling like it was an “us against them” (male vs. female) situation.

On the last day of school Jerry and the other male teaching assistant were both called down to meet with their principal and received word they were hired. Even though they had just one year as a teaching assistant and the female assistants had more experience in the building they were both hired. Jerry believes his male principal had made it a priority to hire male teachers. When Jerry arrived at the Central City Elementary School there was a male music teacher, physical education teacher, and technology teacher in the building. Jerry and the other male teaching assistant became the first two male classroom teachers in the building. Jerry accepted the fourth grade position even though it was not down with the young children he was most comfortable with and had experience being around.

Favorite, tough teacher. When Jerry was hired for his full-time elementary teaching position one of his first experiences was Open House.

I just had a line outside the door. People just wanted to meet me. And that to me... it wasn't a negative... I don't know if it was positive, but it was just they needed to shake my hand and they just needed to touch base with me and meet me for the first time. I had some parents linger behind and sit down and we had a table full of parents just sitting there asking me questions. Where I was coming from, who I was, that kind of a thing, but again nothing negative it was actually a nice positive and I was more than willing to give them the time I didn't care how long it took for me to sit there. I never felt treated differently. I mean I thought it was just because I was a new guy you know. That's kind of how I took it as oh I'm a new guy and they were interested in who I was. I didn't feel like I was

being interviewed or looked upon as anything except hey I want to know who you are.

Even before Open House Jerry had a steady stream of parents coming in to stop by his classroom. They were not visiting to voice concerns, but rather put a face to the name and see the classroom. He believes the influx of visitors was a result of conversations in the community about how he was moving away from traditional instructional practices. Jerry came in with fresh ideas for organizing classroom instruction like not using workbooks or test preparation materials and word spread around the building and into the community about his new methods. By the time Jerry sat down at parent conferences he was able to address perceptions of him “running off the cuff” and explain why he decided not to use the district reading and math series.

Jerry was hired to teach fourth grade with two seasoned classroom teachers who took him “under their wing” and handed him everything. Instead of having to spend his preparation time worrying about instructional materials when he was getting his feet wet, Jerry was able to focus on behavior management and lesson delivery. He viewed their mentoring as a gift and was thankful to be given everything when he was establishing an identity in his own classroom. At first their relationship was one-sided, but over time Jerry began to provide input.

They would always say, “Use it if you want, if you don’t... don’t use it. That’s fine.” They were very open about that and it wasn’t until the second year... I started, you know, influencing them. It took 2 or 3 years before I started even thinking about handing them anything. I think in the first year I did, but you know a lot of it they were like, “Hmmm, no, I can’t do that.” I just felt like I needed to reciprocate some. (*laughing*) I mean you just gave me my whole years worth of

curriculum here. “What about if I try to do this?” I did a lot more of the speaking up. I did a lot of the group activities. I never fought them on a thing and I never needed to. Loved teaching with them, definitely wasn’t my style of teaching to begin with, but I knew that was coming. I could change. I mean I wasn’t going to throw this whole system out just because I didn’t particularly agree with every little thing that we were doing.

By his second year Jerry had become comfortable enough telling his teammates he was putting an end to test preparation workbooks. Fulfilling their mentoring role in a “motherly” way they ordered the workbooks for him anyway, but he did not put them to use in his room.

Despite pulling away from his teammates pedagogically he remained in tune with them on how to treat students. Jerry saw how they “cared about every kid and they learned a lot from them.” Student relationships have always been important to him in his teaching experiences.

Beginning in Pre-Kindergarten and even today in 5th grade Jerry believes he has remained consistent.

I don’t know if I changed much since I was in Pre-K. I really haven’t. You know I still treat them as little adults. Try to give them the experience of hey... “I’ll treat you right if you treat me right.” The golden rule. And let it go from there. And set up structure. And I try to do it in 5th grade.

With both urban and suburban teaching placements Jerry also believes his students have not changed much either. He still greets them as they walk into his room every morning and tries to get to know them personally. It is important for him to have a personal relationship with all of his students. He attempts to empower students in his classroom by

giving them daily choices after keeping his lessons short followed by time for students to get “active working with the materials they just learned.” During a typical class Jerry believes the room should be filled with “a buzz.” He thinks something is wrong when young students, who are naturally noisy, are quiet.

Jerry believes his calm and respectful demeanor sets the tone for learning in his classroom. He admits students will listen to him without imposing a discipline plan.

You know you don’t need to yell or scream. I mean I remember to this day missing school when I was a kid because a substitute came in and she was a screamer. I just played sick for three or four days until my mom caught on and was just like, “what are you doing?” I couldn’t handle it I was just... like my stomach would go into knots and I said to myself that day, “I would never ever treat kids that way.”

Jerry cultivates the respect of his students by “listening to them and taking their feedback to heart.” His goal is to make them feel like they are a “player in the room.” He focuses on developing a classroom community focused on making students feel as though they share ownership.

Jerry shares another key to these relationships is a safe environment, which only starts with the welcoming appearance of his classroom. His warm, yet untraditional classroom environment contains turtle, fish, and shark tanks, lights and streamers hanging from the ceiling, and a living room area with a couch. He even replaced the desks in his classroom with hexagonal tables to promote collaboration. He believes his room design is important for both him and his students.

I think that my classroom set up, the dedication I put into decorating my room in a comfort area where kids feel safe and at home...I think that’s different you know.

I don't think it's anything to do with just me as a person, not a male person, just me as a person. I like a classroom that... I'm there a lot so I want it to be comfortable.

Jerry knows when he has established trust with his students when they begin taking chances asking questions. He describes this process:

Do I know certain kids don't know what I just taught...sure. I mean you can tell by the faces. They have no clue what you're talking about. And when you ask does anybody have a question. And does anybody want to see me do one more before you get turned loose. No hands go up and you know you're tempted to be that old school teacher and say well then ok George come up and do this problem then. You know. And now you just put him on the spot and he's embarrassed. Now you slipped into an old school zone. If you instill that from the very beginning and say to them, hey I'm here to help you. That's what my job is I'm here to help you. If you walk out of here not knowing how to do things then I failed as a teacher that day. And they get that. They're like I don't want you to fail. No I don't want to fail either. I want to be the best. So you got to help me be the best. Making sure you raise your hand. Ask questions. Love it when people ask questions. And I'll tell them that.

He facilitates this trust by randomly selecting a student to be teacher of the day to get in front of the class and present material being covered. While this is occurring Jerry switches roles and becomes a student sitting at a table. The students in his class show even greater attention and admiration when their peers take on the challenge of teaching the class. This fun, daily experience increases respect in the classroom community, while making students an active part of the daily lessons.

Students and parents in the community categorize Jerry as a “nice guy” and he describes himself as a “flexible” teammate at school with his colleagues. His decisions center on doing what is “best for kids” and he is always looking for a better way of doing things.

I think part of my role is more of a security blanket. I am a secure, you know, like steady... and they know what’s coming... some people would even say robotic. (*laughing*) Probably my wife would say robotic. No, I don’t show a lot of emotion either way, you know, positive or negative. So that’s where I can keep that even keel and I think kids feed off that where they know I set up a great routine in this classroom and the routine stays the same every day. The topics change, but the routine doesn’t and I feel like that’s the security. I sense when kids come in my room a sense of like I’m relaxed I know what’s coming. School doesn’t have to be a day of surprises every other day. You need to give them the knowledge and at the same time be there for them, but also be under control to the point where they know what’s happening. The room can run itself. And it can. I could walk out and be like you guys know what to do. And I could leave for 25-30 minutes barring any behavior issues I could come back and the room would still be in one piece.

Jerry designs his daily schedule to remove himself as the center of learning by trusting students with windows of time for them to work independently. Also, every quarter Jerry accepts applications for classroom jobs such as interior designer, animal keepers, and attendance coordinator. His students compete for the opportunity to create classroom bulletin boards during their recess time. The days when his students are hanging up decorations on the boards or mastering multiplication and division facts on the computer in his room during recess Jerry is absent from the male lunchroom. Jerry is more than

willing to go above and beyond the contract hours to build close relationships with his students and aid in their individual improvement.

At the end of the year when students are leaving his class Jerry offers them his email and a message he will always be one of their teachers and to come back if they need anything.

I'm here for one reason, which is to be the best teacher that these kids will ever have. Now will I ever reach that? I hope... maybe, maybe not, but that's my goal. And so I like it when I hear people say that to me that you were my son or daughters favorite teacher because I look at it as if I'm your favorite and if you learn from me then that's what my job was. That's kind of like where my philosophy is I want to be your favorite, but I also want you to say that class was tough. You know he ran a... that was a tough class. You know that speaks volumes to me like... ok I did my job... I did both for you.

Jerry has good feelings when students leave his room, but wants them to feel like they can also come back to visit him. It is not enough for him to just be liked, but also important his students were challenged academically.

Relaxed and pressured. With over a dozen years at the Central City Elementary School Jerry has found himself at various grade levels with many different teammates. He originally was hired to teach fourth grade, but soon moved down to third grade. Next came a couple of second/third grade two-year looping cycles followed by staying put in second grade for a few years. Recently Jerry had a big change being moved out of the early childhood grades teaching all subjects to just his class. He found himself in fifth grade responsible for only teaching math to every student in his small district.

Once I started moving and I realized oh my gosh, you know get out of the rut... its ok to move. I don't want to move constantly, but I don't, I don't worry about it anymore. If I had to move again, ok whatever. I'll go. I'll move whatever grade you want. I think it's benefitted me in realizing that... I've got talent ... give me the curriculum... I can teach it. I'm a teacher. I'm not a third grade teacher. I'm not a fourth grade teacher. I'm a teacher. I taught Pre-K. I can teach anything. The kid's age level doesn't really matter.

Jerry describes a point in his career where he believes in his ability to be successful at whatever grade level he is teaching.

His steady movement over his time at the elementary level has positioned him in and out of high-stakes testing grades in both math and reading.

The teacher's role is being scrutinized now more than ever before. Everything is public as far as test scores are out there people know exactly what you are doing. Here at our small school it's very much a high-stakes, high-pressure situation. It seems like to me at least. And it can get to you if you're not careful. There's a reason why people jump out of them (*laughing*).

When teaching in testing grades Jerry has moments where he has to blindly trust he is properly preparing students and hope his students are learning the material. Being in such a small district with around 60 students in each grade, Jerry finds himself doing the math in his head on which children know the material and which do not. These feelings reach a climax during testing week.

It's crushing to me when the test is handed out and now they're on computers and you're walking behind the kids and you're looking at the screens going, "I didn't teach that. I didn't... I didn't get to that." And then you go to the next person and

they got a different problem on their screen and you're like, "I didn't get to that either." Now that goes back on me ...the kids are sitting there flubbing up, but it's not their fault. That's my fault. So that's what I mean by pressure. You've got to make sure you cover enough so that they can take these tests and do well. I mean you, you can do whatever you can in a classroom to make it as interactive and fun as you want but you've got to cover those standards and you've got to cover them in multiple ways and now its at the point where they have to be able to explain where that answer came from.

During these moments Jerry is internally apologetic to his students thinking, "I'm sorry I didn't get you ready for this."

When Jerry is not in a testing grade his experiences are much different.

You relax. It's a little bit more relaxing. The stress is its not there. You know the pressure is not there on you. It's a different feeling. It's a different vibe. If you are out of a testing year you're just like oh... ok... um... you're more free to do maybe a little bit more experimental type work.

During his time in early childhood grades Jerry would spend time each year developing his own curriculum by collecting materials from many different sources. He was not pleased with the rigor and rigidity of big textbook series and the workbooks that accompanied their programs. His creativity led to the development of big thematic units such as solving the mystery of the dead island grasshoppers using weight and measurement and creating a game for the probability fair. These disappeared with his return to testing grades and rather than taking a chance on "wasting three weeks" of time, at the risk of not covering his entire math curriculum, his creative units were replaced with making sure every standard is covered.

Currently in fifth grade, Jerry considers himself on autopilot because rather than attempting to create his own curriculum he finally decided to use the new math series the district recently purchased.

Finally I came to a point where I look at the series going, “I really couldn’t do this any better.” You know this is really good and its tough. What really drove us before was we were using older materials and the older materials they weren’t challenging to the kids. And unless you skipped up a level, which you couldn’t do because somebody else was using that curriculum, the grade above you, you were kind of in a catch where you were like ok, “I’m either going to give them really easy stuff or I’m going to have to come up with my own little stuff to make and challenge them.” And so now I’ve got material I feel like is overly challenging. I mean it’s too hard for many kids, its way too hard for some kids and that’s good. I mean that’s what it should be. It should be a challenge.

He does not miss having to second-guess himself over whether or not he is picking the right materials to prepare his students for the yearly high-stakes test. Jerry now focuses his time and “creative juices” on the presentation of lessons rather than collecting materials.

Learning process. This year marks the 20th wedding anniversary for Jerry and his wife. His family has grown to include three boys one at the high school, middle school, and elementary school level. Growing up Jerry remembers his dad coming home complaining about his labor-intensive job. Jerry rarely has much to gripe about in his current elementary teaching position, which he believes plays a part in the teaching career aspirations of his three sons. His boys see him staying late in his room full of computers, games, and gadgets as well as vacationing with the guys from work. Their dad’s former

students in the middle and high school often ask them how he is doing leading to what Jerry believes is a “misconstrued vision of what teaching is like.”

When Jerry’s role was reversed and he began attending conferences as a parent, rather than a teacher he describes it as an “eye opening experience.” These moments changed the way he conducted his own conferences with his students. He first realized he “wasn’t getting the information he needed or wanted as a parent” and moving forward he needed to be “honest and forthright” with parents and back it up with data.

Another thing I realized, even if your child’s doing well those parents still need a 30-minute conference. You know to hear how great their child is. You hear a lot of teachers say that. “Why do I have to conference with... they’re doing great.” Well because those parents need to hear that. They’ve got to hear how great their child is you know. Maybe you see them this way, but you know the insight you can gain from kids that are doing great from their parents is phenomenal. But if you just spoon it off as he’s doing fine you know its not enough. I remember a mom saying to me... “oh I can listen to you talk about my daughter doing fantastic things in your classroom all day long.” She goes, “this is heaven to my ears.” She said to me... “you see it too. I am not the only one that sees that my child is great. She’s got manners or she’s got compassion for others.” When you say that to a parent. They well up and tear up and I’m like, “here’s the example. Here’s my data on this. I witnessed her do this to this child. Or somebody gets hurt she’s immediately bending down on her knees helping the child or caressing her helping the child get through something.” “Oh my gosh, really? I see that too. I see that at home all the time. You get my kid.” Those are the kind of things when it comes to conferences I think having your own child kind of helps.”

Since his own boys do very well in school his role as a parent allowed him to take a new perspective when preparing for interactions at school as a teacher. His experiences being a male teacher at parent conferences, involves looking to the father, if he is present, more frequently. Jerry tries to make sure dad is comfortable and engaged because he often only gets moms to attend conferences.

Jerry has flipped the traditional gender script by spending time as a stay at home dad and taking care of the boys as they were growing up when he was off during summer breaks. Following a few other job paths Jerry finds himself in a career where he is comfortable and feels supported by his family. He is in a position where he is not the male breadwinner of the family.

My wife makes more than I do, by far, I mean so yeah, so that's um. I don't know if my boys know that, but I'm sure they do, but its not a topic of, you know, chuckling or smirking, just whatever, it's not the same anymore. It's just... I'm doing something that makes me happy, and it makes everybody else happy.

His interactions at home with his boys are in contrast to his role at school with elementary students.

I mean I actually think I have more contact with my students than I do with my boys. I mean it is definitely... my boys know I'm there though. Some of those students I feel like they need that so I give it to them. If they do need it they're having a rough day. I mean my boys typically don't have many rough days and if they do my wife and I are there for them, but its usually my wife steps in on top of that. When I'm in charge of a classroom there is no wife there so I do have to take on that dual role I feel like. You know in a way. Ok, all right, this is how I should react at this point and honestly I do have to say that to myself. Like this is the way

I should be reacting right now because it's not naturally in me to be a coddler at all. You know. I don't know who brought me up it sounds like Archie Bunker, but it was like... I don't have that in me and I think it's just me. I can't blame it on anyone that... ahhhhh come here, you're alright, you know, that kind of a thing, but I mean if I see tears I do have to go into a mode of ok how are you going to handle this, where typically everything just snaps to it. I just know how I handle certain situations and crying was something I had to work on. Because to me it's just like, you know, maybe it's my athletic background, a sign of weakness, (*laughing*) whatever it would be. But it was like what are you crying for and it's like obviously there's something wrong you shouldn't just, there is a reason why that person is crying. So get down on one knee and figure out what the heck's going on and I had to go through that process of relearning how to act in that way.

When handling situations at school, with his students, being a parent weighs on his mind.

If there's an issue with a student I do think of it as what would the parents want. Or how could this be handled in a positive way? Is that how I want my kids treated comes into mind. If my kids being goofy do I really want them, how do I want that situation handled? Do I want a calm, cool, collected person kneeling down on one knee speaking to them or do I want somebody escorting them quickly down to the office? I generally would think that my kids would want the other way, you know, not to be embarrassed, to be handled quietly to be taken care of... so compassion I think empathy towards others. So I think having your own kids having a teacher that has kids there's a difference there I think its subtle, but I think there's a difference.

Over time, Jerry sees his role as a parent outside of school as influencing his interactions with elementary students and their parents.

White, male, heterosexual early childhood teacher. When Jerry first began teaching Pre-Kindergarten he quickly became aware of the spotlight on his gender.

One person did actually come in and ask me if I was gay. And that was... which is totally unprofessional, but she did come in and it was the daughter of the director. And I told her I wasn't and, you know, whatever. So that was kind of different as a guy. You know I don't think at a construction site... I was never asked that question so... but I answered it and it was no big deal. I didn't care.

While this situation was not handled well, Jerry felt he could have handled a similar situation better with his own son.

I flubbed up early on in this because he was talking about being president of the gay alliance club over at the high school. And I was like, "well I don't know if, if you're not gay I don't know if that would be, you know, president should probably be somebody that is gay or lesbian." And he's like, "no." I was kind of helping him... I thought giving him the out to and he stormed away from the table. I think I said, "I see you're wearing a rainbow bracelet. Are you?" And I think I actually came out and said it. Yeah I got pretty harshly scolded by my wife..."you don't do that" and I'm like, "oh I didn't know."

Sometime later on the same day the United States Supreme Court decided that the fundamental right to marry is guaranteed to same-sex couples his son announced he was gay to Jerry and his wife.

And so it was a pretty monumental day and I was actually watching the news and he left and then came back down and I was watching it at night and he came back

down. “Dad.” “Yeah.” “I just wanted to tell you.” And you know he broke it to me and I’m like, “oh ok.” “He goes this is a pretty big day and I think it’s kind of a fitting time that I tell you on this day.” And I’m like, “This is amazing. I’m always going to love you. It’s just great I just want the best for you. I’m here to help you.” And he was just like, “thank you dad I love you.” And just went back up to bed. And I’m just like what do you say? I mean I wasn’t, you know, I guess there’s a lot of things I could have said. It’s just... Now, he had told other people and he was really slow to tell me. It was something that I think in his head he thought I wasn’t going to be ok with it or something. To me the fact that a 16 year old can come out and say that... I think that we’ve done something right, you know, in a way that he trusts us and feels comfortable to tell us.

It is one thing to be questioned as a heterosexual male Pre-Kindergarten teacher, but now that his son has come out Jerry “fears for his future” and what he is going to face as a young gay male in such a small school community. He supports his son attempting to educate people and “open their eyes” by joining the LBGT committee at the high school.

Jerry shares his thoughts about the possibility of an openly gay teacher in his small school district.

Well if there was somebody openly gay here I think it would be tough. I know I saw a teacher, years ago, have the Gay Pride flag flying in her room and I thought it was very gutsy. I thought it was very brave to fly that flag and maybe nuts to fly that flag in this community. This is a very blue collar, 50s, you know, small town mentality and I think an openly gay male in this building...I don’t know if it would fly in this community. It would be a hard road to travel for sure, um, so I think being a heterosexual male does, in this community, give us a little leg up

and a little bit more power. I hate to think that these families would think differently if I was a black male or if it was a gay male because I know we wouldn't... we would be open armed to all of them, anyone that would come into our building, but I think from the community stand point it would be a hard road for that person.

During his time at the Central City Elementary School Jerry has found himself surrounded by an abundance of male teachers who all identify as White and heterosexual. Based on his 14 years in the district, Jerry is aware his race and heterosexual married status offer him strong credibility in the community and among his peers at school. Over time, in his elementary teaching position, he has also noticed his gender affording him power and prestige as well as pressure and challenges.

Four years into his experiences at the Central City Elementary School Jerry and the other men in the building were thrown into situations where they would have to present to the groups of mostly female staff members on student release days. He believes these doors were opened because of male administrators "channeling the good old boys club." Despite being frequently put in these powerful leadership positions Jerry is quick to point out the men did not volunteer for the opportunities.

So I don't think any of it was a positive, you know, it wasn't. That became kind of a divisive issue, between us, like why are these males up here doing this, you know, presenting to us in a staff meeting type situation, something we don't even want to be doing it's kind of jamming stuff down our throats. So yeah, we were given power and prestige, but it really backfired. There were a lot of rumblings. I know I backpedaled through most of the meeting... that's ok if you don't want to use this (*laughing*) after every little thing I would show them. Like, you know,

you might not want this, but you know this works for me, there was a lot of that, that you had, really had to walk on pins and needles around them because they were already like why are the men the only ones being able to present. But it was technology that we were using, we were all up on our tech so we were the go to people to present it, but its not like we wanted that. My personal feeling is that I think that some of the male administration took advantage of the fact that we are male and they feel more comfortable coming to us.

These technology presentations, which were unpleasantly received by the female staff, also led to Jerry and two other male teachers receiving new computer carts for their classrooms. The administration and technology department staff made the decision based on who they thought was going to use them most frequently, which happened to be the male teachers.

These leadership moments continued with Jerry being selected by both his former male and female administrators for awards and presentations.

I do remember a little bit of power and prestige came with that, the presentations outside of school. When I've been hand picked by two or three different principals to go and present. It was a little bit eye opening like why, why am I being picked again for this? You know, in a good way, but it did, that made me question a little bit, and I thought there was a little bit of um, I don't know, it was kind of strange. I don't know what to, you know, besides the fact that I didn't have tenure and they were used to seeing me. They had just gotten done watching me teach, but I felt like I was getting a little, you know some special treatment there from some people.

Jerry was selected to present at a Leadership Academy with other male teachers for three consecutive years and was even nominated for a regional Martha Holden Jennings Award. After receiving this prestigious award he remembers thinking:

So then right after that, picking me for this I was kind of feeling like especially coming from a male, giving it to me, I was like, “what are you doing? You know, you might want to spread this out.” You know. But its pretty cool I mean I thanked him for it. I was really appreciative. I felt a little bit of is there some special treatment being done there.

Jerry’s male gender has opened up many opportunities in his school district except for coaching. Previously, when he was in the Midwest finishing his teaching degree, he was coaching basketball at a community center. Jerry has been trying, the last couple of years, to find a coaching opening at the middle school or high school to coach boys’ basketball with no luck. Jerry found himself presented with unique opportunities and resources his female peers were not being given, but also with specific gendered demands and difficulties.

What guys do. Near the beginning of his Central City Elementary School experiences Jerry felt a little bit of pressure from his male principal to begin course work on an administration degree; however this pressure did not continue later with his two female administrators. He was approached with some words of advice:

He came to me early on and said, “You want to become a principal. At some point go back and get your degree and get your principal’s license.” And I was like, “Yeah, but I don’t... there’s no way.” He’s like, “You say that now, 20 years down the road you have this in your back pocket, a position opens up, you walk right into it. Get your principals license that’s what guys do”. And it was kind of

like, “Yeah, but I don’t want to leave the.... no I don’t want to.” So it was partly me I didn’t want the... I didn’t even want the temptation of leaving the classroom to get that extra degree to become a principal. I’ve never. I wouldn’t want that. I couldn’t see myself sitting in an office and not being part of what I would say the ground work in the trenches type thing, you know, working directly with kids. I couldn’t stand being a disciplinarian.

Envisioning himself in a principal position was difficult because it goes against much of what he does in his classroom. Rather than calling parents the first two weeks for positive moments, in an administration position Jerry feels as though he would often be calling because students were in trouble. The thought of being an administrator makes Jerry’s “skin crawl” and heading down this path would not be a step up, but put him in a new role and highlight the aspects of teaching he tries to avoid.

Currently, Jerry still does not have his graduate degree, which has allowed him the freedom over the last 14 years to hand pick the classes he takes to renew his teaching license. It has also blocked an opportunity for him to receive tenure requiring his principals to observe his lessons more frequently than most of his peers. This led to him getting a subtle nudge from his male principal to initiate changes in his building.

He would give me articles and his angle, later I found out, was he wanted, he believed just like I did... he didn’t believe in homework either, but he was put in a situation in a building he needed somebody to be the vocal... he couldn’t be the vocal mouth piece, but he was trying to enlist me to get ... “Here’s evidence to back up what you’re saying and I’m giving you that evidence, let’s see if you can run with it and get some people to change their minds. If you can get your team

not to give homework then we might get something rolling here and maybe we can change the building.” But it never happened. That was his move.

Rather than feeling pressure from his former male superintendent he was surprisingly given the green light for physical contact with his students.

It was one of our superintendents who actually said, you know, “Not touch the kids, but hug those kids.” And he was the first male I had actually heard say that. “Definitely hug those kids if they come up to you hug them. Hug and squeeze them. They need that.” To me I was like wow that’s, that’s what we’re here for. And I had already been into that mode where you put your hand on their shoulder. That sort of thing and that was pretty much the only contact I would have with kids. And then teaching second and third grade it was always a little bit uncomfortable when they would be hugging me you know and especially when they’d catch you in a hug. Basically they’re hugging your crotch. Basically. You know because you’re standing up. Especially when they come up. I mean we get that every day. That just happens on a daily basis. It’s not a big deal, but that could be something that could be misconstrued and be like oh yeah that’s weird. I slowly come into a... I feel like a teacher that I’m more touchy, feely these days than I ever have been with kids. High fives. Atta boys. Atta girls. You know. I’m always a little bit different around the girls than the boys, but you know, now, hugs, hugs for the girls, hugs for the guys. Especially when we go to leave school. You know there’s a lot of hugs given out at the end of the day that sort of thing. I don’t shy away from it. I don’t think I ever did, it just made me, I kinda clenched up a little bit when they would come up and squeeze me. Now its more like oh my gosh yeah please come up and give me a hug. You know that’s fine. I feel more

open to it and I think that comes with trusting the community. I don't think you do that as your first year. If you do more power to you, but you're risking things. When you build the trust in the community especially a small community like we have around here, you know, I've got boys the school system. I'm at baseball games. I'm at football games. People are on a first name basis and feel very comfortable telling me things. Me hugging their kid is not something they worry about. There's never a fear or worry that I would be hugging their kid. So but that comes with time. Coming in to a new school if I was transferred today I don't think I would be doing that on the first day of school. It would take some time.

Hearing his male superintendent tell the entire district of teachers at the opening day address that physical contact was not only acceptable, but also encouraged changed how Jerry constructed his own masculinities as well as his interactions with young students. It gave Jerry the green light in his classroom and alleviated his concerns as a male teacher in early childhood education.

Male role model. In the past, every fall, the administration and school psychologist at his building would sit down and discuss the placement of students in classrooms. They had purposely positioned a male teacher in Kindergarten, first grade, and second grade below Jerry giving them the option of a male teacher at every primary grade level. There discussions involved figuring out which students would benefit from having a "male role model" and when Jerry received his class list he began seeing a pattern.

You look at it (*laughing*) wow, look at this. Once again, look at all of them, you know. And it wasn't just, you know, you get a few more males in your room, it was just the name and the stories that were coming with these kids that you were

just, whoa. “I’m loaded up again.” I think I had every child with autism come through. I had them all. And that was rough. I mean that was some rough, rough years. Years that weren’t fun. I mean they weren’t good years. When I would look at the other class lists and I would be like oh my god (*laughing*) that’s a cake class.

Jerry never felt like he was getting taken advantage of having challenging students placed in his class consistently from year to year. He attributed it to was his calm, consistent demeanor. He believes the intervention specialist often placed these students in his room because he was physically able to pick students up and knew he was “going to be able to handle it and he wouldn’t be calling her every second of the day for every little bump in the road that was going to happen with some of the kids.”

The cumulative effects of having difficult classes led Jerry to question if he was able to effectively meet the academic and social needs of all of his students.

They had exhausted me for that year, and one more year of that and it wasn’t just the, it was reaching the top. “How in the world am I reaching the top when I can’t even teach because I don’t have all my students because one of them is missing and I have to go find him?” You know, so I am, not, I’m losing class time because I’ve got an autistic child who will not, does not have an aide, and is running around the room and will not listen at this point. You know. It was rough. Very, very rough. I felt like it was... I needed an aide. (*laughing*). I really did. Honestly I never vocalized that but I felt like I needed it, and ah, it was... like I said it was brutal.

Every year Jerry attempts to fill the male role model stereotype by solving the problems each class presents on his own, without any help. Parents in the community view Jerry as

a disciplinarian because of his gender and his role as a father, which is the opposite of his principal.

I think that's one thing I've noticed is being a male is you get treated a little bit differently because they feel like you are going to be a disciplinarian to the kids and, you know, they're going to act better with you because you know they're afraid of you or the fact that you know you're going to do something to them (*laughing*). That fear is there I guess. The administration I don't think does because they've seen me teach. And they know that's not what I am about.

Repeatedly placing challenging students in Jerry's classroom caused him to navigate the stereotypes associated with his gender in the community, which can be at odds with the masculinities he constructs in his room.

You know, I always said as a male teacher the easiest thing to do would be to raise my voice because my classroom would be the quietest classroom in the building. I would have complete control all the time. They'd be scared, crapping in their seats in fear of what I could do to them as far as he's going to embarrass me. He's going to yell at me. I didn't do my homework. I'm going to do my homework for that teacher because, oh my gosh, you know, what's going to happen if he doesn't. That's easy teaching to me. I can't be that way. I couldn't do that to kids.

In terms of educating young children Jerry does not see a difference "in what he can do compared to what a female can do in his classroom." He does not feel an obligation to be a disciplinarian because that would be changing who he is as a teacher. At home Jerry plays an equal role in discipline, but sees his wife as more of the disciplinarian.

“Well I mean in the classroom I don’t feel the need to carry on a male role. I can’t imagine what it would be other than that authoritarian role that you would play. It’s being a role model in that way, you know, being able to respond or kids feeling comfortable with you because you are a male.”

By moving away from stereotypical male traits Jerry has carved out his own masculinities and identity in his early childhood setting.

Another issue Jerry has faced in the primary grades is parent requests. Every year he would hear the same message from parents, “I want my kid in your classroom. What can I do? What can you do to get my you know my kid in your class?” Some parents had the social capital to make this happen.

I know there have been switches and come the first week of school all of the sudden switches are made and all of the sudden this child is now going to be with you. You know and you read the last name and you’re like ahhh ok because (*laughing*) you know what just happened. You know it’s a big name in the community that does have a big voice you know they pulled some strings. I don’t ever remember having that feeling when I was a kid wanting a certain teacher. I mean once you got them you loved them, you know, it didn’t really matter what teacher I got. And I never really looked at the teachers and went oh my gosh I want this one, I want that one. I never really had that feeling that a lot of kids in our small district do. Prior to this administration, probably 2 administrations ago if you wanted a certain teacher you could get them. You know all you had to do was go in and ask. And you got who you wanted. Now the foot has been put down and that doesn’t happen, which is a great policy, you shouldn’t be able to dictate

(*laughing*) all the way through. You can't. It's a whole can of worms you're going to open up.

Some of these requests he attributes to his "cool" classroom with turtle and fish tanks, but he also thinks it might be the "guy thing" of parents wanting their child placed in the male teacher's classroom during their journey through the building because "it is a change for some of them."

And especially like we said before I think a lot of the parents think of us as that father figure and that disciplinarian and they like that, especially in this community, and so I think we are given a little bit more of a prestigious level of oh my gosh, you get to have this. So I think they get used to that male role model that's in those grades and if you don't have a chance to be with that male role model I do feel like, they do feel cheated a little bit. Like why didn't I get to have them? Not that the women are you know a dime a dozen, but they are I mean there's a bunch of them, you know, and there's two on every team, typically, or three on some. So they don't feel cheated by not having had one of the women.

Accepting these last minute class list changes put a spotlight on the Jerry's gender. It was also part of the reason he jumped at the opportunity last year to move from second grade up to a departmentalized fifth grade position to teach every student in math.

Now that I'm departmentalized I love it because it is not, there are no hard feelings of... I wish I could have him because they all do have me. Honestly it eases my mind a lot because I don't feel like I'm leaving anybody out. I wanted every kid to experience some of the things that I was doing in my class. And when I wasn't departmentalized and when I would float these ideas to my colleagues and they would decline to do them, not for any reason, I just felt like

they didn't want anything to do with me so I was isolated already (*laughing*). I knew it was causing a division in the team and I knew I was the cause of it. An easier way for me to do that would have been to conform to the two, I was the odd man out, conform to what they were doing kind of going back to my first days of teaching where they handed me stuff and I did it. I could have gone back that route and that team would have stayed positive, but at that point I got 9 years in, I'm set in my ways as far as the curriculum that I've built up.

Jerry was even approached by his last two female principals about the two different curricula (his and the other two female teammates') being used at his grade level. He told them it would be difficult to change his style of teaching to be more aligned with their approach. He was surprised to receive their full support with not only the divide in curriculum, but also his interest in changing grade levels. Even with all the benefits, challenges, and changes in grade levels Jerry continues to remain teaching at the elementary level with a large percentage of male teachers in his building.

Gender proportions. When Jerry was hired fourteen years ago at the Central City Elementary School he did not immediately notice the presence of male teachers. Over the next five years he began to see the "scales starting to tip."

This was a trend, I mean there were females not being hired, there was no female coming in to the building, it was all male and back then we didn't have the turnover we have now, so one position every two years being filled by a male. That became, you know, we started giggling a little bit (*laughing*) like what's going on?

Three of the next four teachers hired were male and they started in Kindergarten and first grade. He remembers his male principal having a specific plan to hire men at every grade

level. His plan was a success and over the next five years only one grade was missing a male teacher, while first grade had two. This hiring pattern resulted in the men shedding their token status for experiences in a nearly gender balanced early childhood staff environment.

I did hear, you know, because there was talk, we were almost becoming a majority, you know of males to females. I remember some of the beginning staff meetings where that was occurring, there were some rumblings, like look at all the males, because we were now taking up two tables instead of just one little one in the corner. We became more of a bigger voice in the room, not just because of that, because we had more people in our group and we had a couple females that were on our side on decisions. So all of the sudden we were swinging votes and kind of directing where the building was going in some ways. Plus our principal was a male, so we had him on our side, you know, not that we were taking sides, but we did have...males were dominating this building for a while, now its slowly trickled down a little bit, but you know we still got good numbers.

With the last two principals being female, things have changed and the last four hires have been female teachers along with two male teachers leaving to pursue administration positions.

With an unusually high number of male teachers in his elementary building, over time, Jerry saw a change with the reactions in the community.

I mean people know you in the community and there's less interest in who you are and you know they've already heard your back story and they know who you are and they've had siblings come through they've heard the spiel, they know me. They know what I'm like so there's less interest in me now. I think it's just the

kids talk positively about you and I think parents are at ease, there's never any concern, not that I notice. I think that first year there was a little bit of concern.

But now it's so commonplace now with the males in our building I think it's kind of eased everybody's mind. Everybody's here for the right reasons.

With the male teachers in the building being so close inside and outside of school Jerry constantly hears positive comments directed at them as a group when he is coaching in the community.

I hear it all the time in the community. My son or daughter has had all the male teachers in the building and we love you all. You know, we get a lot of praise out there and it's really truly like wow they really did love the fact that we were in this building. The parents do know of us and they do know that we're tight. It's not a negative. I know they all think its kind of cool and positive that their kids are with guys and males.

The parents in the community have become aware of yearly "mancation" fishing trips the male teachers have taken each of the last ten years. Fears or suspicions about the intentions of the men in the building, brought on by their gender, have withered away over time with increased numbers. Their cohesiveness has also led to them being associated together as a group by the parents in the community, administration, and even their female peers in the building.

Large numbers of men teaching in the building also led to them carving out a space to eat outside of the traditional teacher lounge. Jerry remembers it being a mutual split when the men commandeered an old teaching assistant office for their lunchroom, which would later be named the "mancave." For years Jerry did not come up to eat in the mancave with the other male teachers because he used his lunch period as an extra plan

period with his two female teammates to discuss both their personal lives and also grade level curriculum. He initially made the decision to continue eating with his team, but would later join the men when he moved to a new grade level team.

We were good friends it wasn't a bad choice or I didn't feel bad about it at all, but I would hear the laughter coming from this room (*laughing*) and want, you know, wish I was involved more. So I missed a lot and you know the male bonding not being up here for sure. I've been eating up here the last 3 years. I mean I feel like I definitely made a sacrifice by not eating up here. That was like kind of babyish of me that I, you know, to feel that way that I wasn't eating with you guys, but that was kind of a little issue, I mean, for me, you know, cause I wanted to keep that cohesiveness of the team. The team came first for me.

When the core of his team was moved to different grade levels Jerry did not have the same established loyalty to his new teammates. It offered him a clean break to make a change with his lunch company.

Having a safe lunch haven offers the men a unique space in the building to cultivate relationships.

We all have developed this cohesiveness that we hang out together after school and during the summer vacations we take together. There's a different sense of going to a colleague because it's not like a colleague, it's your friend that you're going to. That to me is the difference compared to any other female in this building, going to them and saying hey how did... it's more of a business end. Where here... oh by the way, "I wanted to ask you, how did you deal with this kid? How did you teach this concept?" It's like, it's a whole different feeling, its not a business it's just a friend going to a friend asking a question, you know, and

it's that to me, benefits this school incredibly. I mean the fact that we have that tightness, that cohesiveness, we can laugh about it, and know where each other are coming from.

From the men's standpoint a separate lunchroom was great, but Jerry initially felt the female teachers in the building were "a little bit jealous." They would jokingly ask about what was going on in the mancave and how they could get in. After many years they seemed to get used to it and there have not been many hard feelings about the separation. Jerry is still concerned about this space:

I think I've always felt, and I've always been in fear that it will be taken away from us at some point. I don't know why, but I just feel like this is a space that's too valuable to the school (*laughing*) that I don't know that our manly rights of like hey we want a place to eat. I don't know if that will hold up in the principal's eyes as a place that we need to have.

Jerry has seen the mancave reach a point, over the last decade, where female teachers, secretaries, and administrators still make light of it, but have grown to accept it.

When Jerry was teaching Pre-Kindergarten and completing his student teaching he found himself a token male in both of those environments. Now, being in a small district with only three teachers at each grade level, Jerry has experienced moments where he felt like the token male within his grade level.

So it's interesting I think if you really, the token male, I think you can rest, a little bit, you know, you're just like hey, its me, you know, I am the guy, I'm the go to guy. And you get to, its like oh, can you go ask him? No honestly and its going to come off wrong. It was like... the token male, so I had my leg up on them,

automatically right there, in my eyes, well maybe not in theirs, but I felt like I did.”

A combination of his gender, creative teaching philosophy, and interest in integrating technology set him apart from his two female teammates in second grade. This token status has disappeared with additional men being hired and his request to move up to a fifth grade where he is teaching on a team with another male teacher.

During the past fourteen years Jerry has built strong friendships with the other men in the building and values their opinions. He has developed strong partnerships with the men teaching in the grades below him because of their mutual interest in using technology in the classroom. His gender uniqueness has worn off at the Central City Elementary Building and teaching with other men in the building has changed his primary teaching experiences.

You don't have that uniqueness that you're the only one, you know, you are now, not in direct competition but you're looking to be, you know, something better than the last guy that they had. So there is that push to be yourself, but at the same time, you know, you just can't rely on hey I'm a male, I'm a little different. There are four males below me. Yeah I do feel that, that push to be... and it's a good thing, anytime there's something that pushes you.

Jerry looks at his experiences teaching with increased staff gender proportions as benefitting the building and pushing him as well as the other male teacher “in the right direction.”

The long haul. Throughout his time in early childhood education Jerry has found a way to be happy with whatever age he is teaching. His favorite place depends on when you are asking him the question.

At one point I wouldn't have even thought of going up. Like when I was in the Pre-K program I loved working with little ones. I could see myself... first would probably be the max. I would see myself being a first grade teacher. But then when I was put in fourth and you take a job when a job opens up that was my first spot ... you don't fight for anything else. Thank you and you take your fourth grade position. And I loved that and I was like, oh wow, this works and my results were great. And I'm like ok I can succeed at this level.

Jerry finds himself content in his current fifth grade teaching position.

Honestly I don't know if I could go back. Going back right now scares me because having taught for so many years of teaching everything and now having one year under my belt of only teaching math and having my ultimate goal of being the best teacher I can possibly be I can see it happening when I am only teaching one subject. I don't know if you can if you're teaching them all because it's... you're the jack-of-all-trades. I mean you're not... its tough... I mean its really hard to be like on top of Language Arts, here comes Math, oh here's 20 minutes of Science, oh wait let's get our Social Studies lesson in. I mean you know... to be good at all of those its pretty tough. I did my best, but I was strong at certain subjects and I think any elementary teacher that does it will tell you that. It's a real tough part of the job.

Jerry has never had a turning point where his students were "driving him nuts" and thought to himself "I can't be in the elementary school anymore." He has "never been swayed out of the elementary school and can't see it happening."

Jerry continues to love teaching and being around young children even after seventeen years in the classroom. He views teaching not as work, rather something he

takes joy in doing. He believes, "I'm only happy when I am in front of those kids and it's natural and it's easy. It's not work to me, it's like enjoyment to be up there." In his past construction and landscaping jobs Jerry knew it was work because he was punching a clock. In teaching he finds comfort in the impact he has on his students and this keeps him coming and going. Jerry avoided a route to administration because his "drive to do it would be monetary" and in his opinion would create a feeling he was getting a job again.

He has remained at the Central City Elementary School because his salary has been more than acceptable and he has also been able to pick up paid supplemental contracts leading Student Council and Science Olympiad. Another factor in his remaining is the company he keeps with the abundance of men at his elementary building.

I think secretly, not that I've had any aspirations of leaving this school district because I haven't... I haven't even been approached by anybody or anything like that, but to leave, it's ah hard. I mean it would be hard to leave this. It's not the only thing keeping me here, but it is a piece of it. That cohesiveness, we have a great time. I mean we'll probably be life long friends from this experience. That feeling of brotherhood or whatever you want to call it. It's pretty tight and that to me is one of the reasons, even if I was approached, that would come into play. Like ooh really what's... is there men over there? (*laughing*) What's it going to be like? You know that would be a main question. What am I going to be missing? Is that going to be the same? Is it worth it? You know. Or if it was a different money amount... is 5 thousand dollars more a year really worth that? I don't know. You know so, all those, I think behind all the stories and everything that's happened, I think that has caused this kind of a feeling inside where I think we all have that, if you do choose to leave, what are you leaving? You know the

school life that we've established here, and built here, comes down to a little bit of this too, this comes into play. We spend a lot of time together. (*laughing*) It's a long year. And we choose, I mean that's part of the beauty of it. We choose to extend the year. I mean there's one thing. I say goodbye, you know, to my female colleagues. I'm not looking to spend any time over the summer. I would, but I'm not looking to generally do that. I mean it's... I'll see you in the fall (*laughing*). Where we're like hey what are we doing next week? You know what's the plan for next week's mancation? So we are looking to extend our time together cause it just hasn't been enough. So kind of interesting that we do have that bond.

When male teachers have retired or found other teaching positions outside of the Central City Elementary School Jerry has seen its effect on them. It is evident something is missing from their experiences outside of the manclub.

In his seventeenth year working with young children Jerry continues to reflect on how to improve.

My struggles... I think you always are struggling with, I'm always struggling myself with how... can I get it better? Can I be better at this? Should it be a different way? I never set my mind to ok, I got it, I'm done. It always can be improved and sometimes I wonder if I should stop. (*laughing*) You know. Have I done it good enough? Is that the best it can be? And I think that's a struggle, I have, it's why I stay late at night."

In his current teaching role Jerry continues to feel like he is "still doing a good job and can help kids." When Jerry feels like he is not helping students anymore and he is getting stagnant in the classroom it will be time to leave early childhood education. Looking to the future he shares:

Maybe I will be burned out on it. You know, but I'll do something else, but I can't right now. I don't feel that way. And I don't see it coming in the future. You know. I could see myself being a 40-year-old teacher, 40 years put in. I could see that happening.

Until then he will arrive every fall to his classroom thinking, "I've got the best job in the world and I'm coming back to it."

Conclusion. Jerry had an eventful path, with stops in landscaping and construction, in becoming an early childhood education teacher. During his experiences teaching Pre-Kindergarten his gender was under a microscope, which waned over time. When he arrived at the Central City Elementary Building he moved from being a token male to being just one of the men in the building. He resisted advice from administrators to become a principal, yet benefitted from their encouragement to consistently give the children in his classroom hugs. His gender offered both benefits and challenges during his identity negotiation and construction of masculinities. Many factors have helped him remain in the primary classroom with young children including his friendships with the abundance of male teachers in his building.

George

"Mr. Slinger was sharp as a tack. He wore artistic shirts.

He wore glasses on a chain around his neck.

And he wore a different colored tie for each day of the week." (Henkes, 1996)

George settled in early childhood education after originally wanting to work with older students. His personal background in sports led him to coaching athletics at the middle school and high school level. George is married and has two children who share his interest in participating in organized sporting activities. He has spent the last fourteen

years teaching Kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and third grade all at the Central City Elementary School. During this time George has seen his teaching assignment change frequently as well as his workload and responsibilities.

Guided into early childhood education. When George was three years old his parents divorced. His dad ended up getting custody, which meant every other weekend, a week at Christmas, and one month in the summer he found himself at mom's house. Although his parents kept everything civil throughout the divorce, it influenced his career choice.

I think if my mom would have gotten custody I probably would not be an elementary teacher. I'd probably be... I don't know. I love my mom, but I think she would have... this could be just because she didn't see me as much. I'd say she babied me more as opposed to my dad who was a little bit tougher on me, which I think looking back on it was probably better for me in the long run.

During middle school and the beginning of high school George had not settled on a career path; however becoming an architect was on his mind. This changed when he became close with his high school history teacher who also happened to be his athletic coach. He saw the "difference he made" with students in his teaching and coaching role and decided teaching would be a good career to choose.

George enrolled in a small liberal arts college and declared a major in secondary education with a focus in social studies. He also participated in intercollegiate sports as a member of the track and field team. It was on this team that he developed a mentored relationship with his coach, who also worked as an early childhood physical education teacher.

When we were in season you spend so much time traveling that you just start picking their brain then realize what they are doing and how much fun they are having with it. That's what made me want to switch to elementary. Just all of that close bonding time we had on the road. Some days we would get up on Saturday and leave for a track meet at six in the morning and come back at eight at night and you are with that group the whole time. There were a couple other education majors too and we would talk and talk to him.

His college coach also happened to be an elementary physical education teacher and during the spring of his sophomore year he invited George in to observe his school and classroom. Following this experience George recalls:

It just felt more comfortable and just more welcoming. And it felt like it would just be a fun place to work. Still working with kids, but it felt like that would be more of where I would be suited to work instead of working with the older ones.

This visit ended up putting George on a path to working with young students. Both his high school and college coach were strong mentor figures for him. Even today he keeps in contact with his high school track coach and his family. He views these relationships as being "more friends than coach/athlete or student/teacher relationships" and a big part of why he ended up changing to early childhood education.

After his sophomore year instead of moving back home with his dad George got a job at a nursery/preschool and moved into an off campus apartment. He believes this decision to live independently aligned with what his dad taught him growing up. When he started back to school his junior year George remembers his early moments as a male in the early childhood education department.

The first day of class the students in the classroom were very surprised to see me walk in and sit down. Especially wondering if I was in the right classroom.

Luckily there were a couple of the professors that were also male, who taught

elementary for years, and they thought it was wonderful... using me as an example quite often, which was fine with me.

This was only the beginning of George being aware of his gender. Later in his program he experienced:

Once we got into our methods I was typically the only male and sometimes even the teachers were female. I'd get... I wouldn't say singled out.... but a lot of what's your perspective on this because I came with a different perspective from everybody else in the room.

While his female classmates were surprised, George received quite different reactions from his male friends.

I used to get a lot of crap from my roommates and friends in college because they'd say, "Ohhh what are you doing drawing again for class? What are you doing coloring an art picture?" We had to do a handwriting course where we had to send it in to Zaner-Bloser and I am sitting there doing my handwriting and they'd come in and start laughing and say, "Really this is what you are this is what you are doing in college?" So I caught a lot from them.

George was able to ignore these reactions by thinking to himself his friends would not be able to handle the responsibilities of being in the elementary classroom with young children. Even today, with fourteen years in the primary classroom, George shares the difference in reactions from females who often comment on how it is "cute" he is an elementary teacher or males who usually question his career choice.

Standing out. George graduated from college with an early childhood education degree, which offered him the opportunity to teach pre-kindergarten through third grade. Over the summer, following graduation, he accepted a landscaping job and began looking

for a full-time teaching position. As summer faded he began wondering if he should apply for substitute teaching positions or even continue into late Fall with his landscaping position when he received an interview for a teaching assistant position at the Central City Elementary Building. He was offered and accepted the position spending the majority of his time one on one with an autistic student as well as helping out in primary classrooms and during recess. By the end of his first year he recalls:

I was applying elsewhere because that is not what I wanted to do. One of the older teachers said, "If at all possible try and stay." She said, "If you leave now it will be great for right now, but it won't be the best move for your career." She said, "For one financially it would make great sense because I am lucky enough to work in a great paying district." She also said, "If you go somewhere else you are going to not be part of this great community. You are going to be just another teacher possible in some big school or some big district, but here you are going to be, if you stick it out for your career, you are going to be that pillar." She said, "It's just a phenomenal place to work" and I'm glad I made the choice to stay even though I was looking elsewhere.

Late in the spring two full-time elementary teaching positions opened up at his building and George submitted his application. He believes his gender aided him and some of the other males in the building.

I think it started with the openness of our principal to hire males. We definitely stood out in the application process. I heard of 7.., 8... 900 applicants for one or two jobs and sometimes you need that little bit of something to stand out. And if there are 800 women applying and 10 guys you sort of got the edge right there. Especially if someone is looking to balance it out because its such a female

dominated profession that if you're looking for more of that 50/50 mix it helps out ... helps you stand out.

George accepted a first grade teaching position and believes the transition was much easier because he knew everyone in the building, the procedures, and where to go for help. The same year he was hired to teach first grade another male teacher also accepted a fourth grade teaching position. When George was hired there was only a male principal, physical education teacher, music teacher, and upper elementary science teacher at the Central City Elementary Building, while currently there is almost one male teacher at every grade level and some even have two.

Hopping around. After his initial year as a teaching assistant, George has spent the past thirteen years teaching in Kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and third grade. He has taught all subject areas to his self-contained class, looped with his students for two consecutive years, and presently is departmentalized in third grade teaching math. George has bounced around to many grade levels with new teams and always found himself positioned as the only male with one or two female teammates. When he first started as a teaching assistant he remembers:

I had lunch and recess duty with the fifth graders. And I think one thing that I needed to improve on, I realized on this early on, was I tried to be too friendly too quick. And by that time they realized they could try and take advantage of me. And they would push it to the limit and then I had to change my philosophy by that time it was almost a little too late. So that was that first year I realized that I needed to set the expectations a little bit more from the beginning. It is a little bit tougher and I wasn't their homeroom teacher and I just had them for basically those free times.

Only a year later he found his interactions teaching first grade to be much different.

There wasn't as big of an issue because of the age difference. I think some of them were a little intimidated just because I was the... being a first grader 6 or 7 years old and having this big guy stand in front of the classroom with a big voice and some of them were probably a little intimidated at first so I didn't have to worry about that as much. At that age I think there a little bit more willing to please as well.

Not only was he one of the first two male classroom teachers, he was also the youngest male teacher in the building teaching at the youngest grade level. When George first started out he was on a team with two veteran female teachers who took him under their wing. Very early on he remembers a difficult situation with a parent where his teammates handled it for him. During these initial moments George welcomed their help sharing it was nice to have them "look out for me right at the beginning when I was just getting my feet wet." Over time he believes people who have worked with him would say he is "a great teammate who is hard working and always willing to help out."

His first three years George moved from first grade, to second grade, and down to Kindergarten, which began to be a trend. Although he began his career changing grade levels for nine straight years, maybe the most challenging aspect of hopping around was the switch from looping to departmentalization.

We started out with the looping where we really got to know the families and last couple years we have departmentalized and it's a lot more difficult to get to know the families because not only do you not have them for two years, but you only have them for 90 minutes a day basically. It's a lot more difficult to get closer to the students and to the families.

When George was teaching Kindergarten and first grade he found it much easier to set aside time to sit and talk with students. Planning centers or giving students time to create and play allowed him moments to develop relationships, but now in a departmentalized third grade math position he struggles with consistently allocating the time away from academic activities. When George was looping with students from second to third grade he was also with all of his students for the entire day. This allowed him to invite parents in to volunteer for centers, which he has not continued in his departmentalized teaching assignment. Looping also allowed him to pick up where he left off with his students because they were accustomed to routines and expectations and felt more comfortable the second year. When he made the change from looping between second and third grade to teaching just third grade math he noticed a difference.

It made it a lot easier to plan great lessons, but it also made it more difficult because you are more isolated. The building was basically a community within itself. Each grade worked so closely together and when we had looping we had two looping teams that worked very closely together with planning. Now it's one third grade math teacher and it is me. And if I want to plan with somebody else I have to go to a different grade or a different subject area to try and come up with some ideas. So that makes it a little bit more difficult sometimes, but then again if I want to do something nobody is going to disagree with me on it.

When his building went away from looping to departmentalization George also saw a change in his relationships with students and parents.

As we went away from the looping and went to the departmentalization I see some of the students in the hallway and I don't feel as close to them as I was before. I still have, on the curriculum nights and open houses, some of the middle

school kids that are about two feet taller and voices a lot deeper come and say, “Do you remember me?” It will take me a second, but I’ll remember them versus some of the students that I’ve had recently might give me a wave in the hallway and that would be about it.

One of George’s core principles is building relationships with students, which he found was much easier in Kindergarten and first grade when looping.

If you don’t know your students and you don’t have a good relationship you cannot be successful in the classroom. You need to understand where they are coming from. I think having that good relationship and just keeping things... school is the one place where they know what is expected every day. So if you have a good relationship and they know I’m going to come here. I am going to have some fun. I’m going to get something accomplished. I am going to be safe. I am going to be cared for. They might not have that the other sixteen hours out of the day.

George, especially at the beginning of the year, continues to set aside time each week to learn student interests and discuss their weekend plans and activities. He values speaking individually with students and making them laugh is a way for students to “forget about everything else really quick.”

George emphasizes finding out what students need to be successful and attempts to foster responsibility and independence in them just like his dad provided for him growing up. He offers his students the freedom, following direct instruction, to complete their assigned work under desks or even in the hallway. George believes he is hard on his students, but what they might see as being mean is just his way of bringing out their

potential. By giving his students time and resources he believes they can “go take care of it and get done with what they need to get done.”

In class, George will often draw on his own background by pulling current sports events into his daily math lessons because of both student and personal interest. He even keeps a real bowling pin on a shelf in his classroom and every year waits for a student to ask about it. When asked he shares the following sports analogy with his students:

Think of our work as a game of bowling. The pins are always going to be there.

You want to try your best to knock them down. Your work your assignments are going to be there. You want to try and do your best to go after it do your best to get them all down. Do your best to get them all correct. So it's like a game of bowling. When you are in the classroom. The pin's going to be there it's your goal to knock it down.

George has benefitted from his experience in the classroom and is willing to take chances in his daily instructional practices. He describes this mindset:

Don't be afraid to fail. If it doesn't work so what? It's just one day, one class. Try something else the next day. It's going to happen. Even if you think it's going to be the best lesson ever it might bomb. You might have this great idea it might not work technology might not work. Power might go out. Oh well. You just got to learn to roll with it. That's life. I know what I need to do and I think I'm pretty good at it too. I think that would be a good way to describe... I am confident in what I do. I might not do it the exact same way by the book. I get great results with my students how I teach.

Despite having a high belief in his ability to succeed as a teacher in early childhood education, George is quick to share recent educational policies and responsibilities that have begun to influence his classroom.

Finding a Balance. One of the biggest challenges George manages in third grade is mandatory high-stakes testing. Just last year George and his grade level team had to prepare their students for nineteen different tests throughout the course of the school year.

With how those are spread out it seemed like there were weeks where we weren't really teaching. We were preparing for the test. It's hard to find the fine balance because both we're judged and the students are judged on the test especially with the third grade guarantee this year if the students didn't pass they didn't pass. So the reality of that pressure was there. And we had some students really feel it. But trying to keep as much normalcy as we could even with all the testing going on.

George feels as though the pressure is more on his students than him and feels bad about the added stress they experience. He does not lose sleep at night because of the test, but knows some of his students do.

I think especially with how instant and competitive the world is and being a very competitive person myself...I don't want to lose. So I think I may be able to help even though it is really tough on the students how many tests they have to do and how much prep and how much time it takes. But just being as competitive as I am ... I'm not going to let them fail. Just based off of that and I always say we are going against everybody else. We are scrimmaging right now in the classroom for the big game. We want to be ready for it. I think I do as well as I can with it. I feel like my students are prepared. Just something else we have to do.

With so much time set aside for state testing and preparation, George and his third grade teammates have attempted to counterbalance this by planning weekly times for quick and collaborative learning games to make school more enjoyable for their students.

The testing schedule has muddied pedagogical decisions George makes for his third grade students. He describes negotiating this dilemma:

There's things you want to do and things you need to do. And sometimes what you need to do probably isn't as important what you still want to do. It's that balance what do I have to get done because I have been told I need to do this or what do I think is best for the child? And that's a fine balance and that goes back to the testing. Yes the testing is important. I have to do that because that's what we're judged upon, but I don't think it's always best. And trying to find that balance between the two is very challenging.

George is aware he needs to cover the common core curriculum throughout the year, but direct test preparation instruction is beginning to take a back seat to other hands-on activities.

The test scores are important, but what student is going to remember their test score in third grade? They are going to remember those projects. They are going to remember this year we did a Trade Fair and International Day, two big projects that were cross-curricular. Both times we had students say this was the best day of school ever. They're going to remember that when they are older in high school and talk about that and not we did workbook page 37.

He believes high-stakes testing has impacted his classroom and continues to influence what he values in early childhood education.

It is not the time management of getting my curriculum done. It is time management as opposed to keeping that personal touch in the elementary school. Because we are so... we need to do this day 1, day 2, day 3... it's finding the time to ask how was your weekend? What are you doing this weekend? How was your game? Do you get a new dog? Some of those things you miss and you almost feel like we don't have time for it, but that's the important thing. They're not going to remember 10 years from now what we did on that Wednesday. They are going to remember that field trip. Or they're going to remember when we took the time to show the presentation they made of their pet.

George continues to find a way to make sure each one of his students is prepared for state testing, but is also concerned with putting a personal touch on planning memorable activities.

Since George is the only third grade math teacher in the Central City Elementary School he has been pulling learning materials from different places and implementing them in his classroom with a guess and check approach. If a lesson is not effective he creates something himself or looks in another place. George is in the unique position of having every third grade math student, which means he can only collaborate with fourth and fifth grade teachers to see if they are all on the same page or heading in the same direction. George is on his own, which forces him to rely heavily on a combination of pacing guides, self-reflection, and individual student goal setting.

George continues to negotiate a balance between preparing his students to score well on standardized assessments with developing relationships and planning interesting activities. With experiences teaching in testing and non-testing grades George believes

his extended time in the field has given him the confidence to begin moving away from constantly focusing on test preparation.

I think I am able to pull back a little bit now that the students are older and I have been teaching long enough to let them do a little bit more self-discovery because they are able to and especially with technology. I can give them a project and they come up with more creative ideas than I can with just letting them run with it.

Being confident enough to take the step back and let them learn on their own. It is big one.

The testing schedule continues to change this year in third grade and George finds himself in the familiar position of finding a balance among the increased workload and responsibilities and making sure every student leaves third grade with positive and memorable experiences.

Role Model At Home and School. George got married the summer between his year as a teaching assistant and his first year teaching first grade to a secondary teacher working with special education students. During the next five years their family grew and they welcomed a son followed, about two years later, by a daughter. Now, having two teachers in the family, George shares dinnertime can often be difficult for their two children because most of the time he and his wife are talking about school. Having children of his own has impacted George in the early childhood classroom.

That was a big eye opener to see, especially having younger ones and being relatively young when I had him, to see what parents really go through because at that point I was 26. Being relatively young and learning all the responsibilities that they have to balance. I was finally having to balance them myself instead of just coming and teaching and going home.

Later, when his son began attending elementary school in the same grades George had taught, it influenced his class even more.

This was an interesting year because all year long I said, “My son is in third grade. I know what he is doing. And I know what you guys should be doing too.” I said that on a weekly basis. “I know how much homework he has and I know how much I am giving you and it is a lot less than him. So I expect it to be done.” And we would talk about how our schedule was and time management. When some students said I didn’t have time to do this last night. I said, “What’d you do last night.” “I just had soccer practice.” I said, “Well here’s what we had last night” and I would rattle off the five or six different things that we still got our homework done because if you don’t have your homework done you’re not going to practice. We ate dinner, showered, and we got everything done. So I said, “That’s not a good excuse.”

Having a son in the same grade level he was teaching put George in a position where for the first time he understood the perspectives of his students. He shared his personal experiences with his students at school as an example of the importance of developing time management skills and taking responsibility for your work. Sometimes when George attempts to impart these same lessons to his son at home he is met with resistance.

We butt heads all the time because we are very similar. I am sure I was the same little kid back when and I know there were times I didn’t like what my parents said, but I know the reasons why I am saying it, even though he doesn’t like it. Respect what I told you to do and don’t complain and just do it because it will take you longer if you pout about it. You have to respect me, but you don’t necessarily have to like me. I get a lot of ... I have to say more of the

disciplinarian. I want them to learn that I am not their friend right now, but they'll hopefully when they are older know why I am so hard on them sometimes. So I expect a lot from them just because I know they are capable of producing great things.

George maintains high expectations for his children both at home and school. At school he tries to choose his words carefully when he says something, especially when he is not happy.

I raise my voice a few times throughout the year, but I choose those times wisely. And it works. I don't have to do it very often. I tell the students I don't like doing this. Nobody is happy right now. I am not happy. You're not happy because you just got yelled at. I try not to do that. This is the one place they shouldn't be yelled at.

George consistently carries a calm demeanor and feels too much yelling can quickly turn into an "in one ear and out the other" situation. Every once in a while he feels that raising his voice at the right time and place can set a tone and send a message to his classroom.

Since his parents got divorced when he was three, George had the unique perspective of growing up with his father rather than his mother. With the divorce rate being so high and with a growing number of his students being raised by their mom in a single parent household George sees himself as a male role model in his teaching position at the elementary level.

Being that teacher that can understand, especially for those kids that don't have the father figure... to be there for them. I can relate a lot with those kids that didn't have that guy in their life, that male influence. I especially look out for

those kids. But just want to keep... have it be very fun when we are in the classroom, but obviously get done with what we need to do.

He describes the characteristics of this role:

Somebody who is respectful. Somebody who is enthusiastic about what they love to do. Somebody who is passionate. Somebody who cares for you every day even though there is no relation to you. Quite a few kids are being raised, especially some of the boys, being raised by women and they might have a coach for ... you know a season or they might have a neighbor, but to see that male and being able to bring in that male personality I think helps especially helps some of the boys that don't have that role model at home.

Being a male role model is not just limited to boys from single parent households.

George believes it extends to all students on a range of topics like the language students choose to speak, the music they listen to, and even sports.

I think saying..."I don't do that at my house or I don't watch that will maybe make them think"... hmmm well maybe I shouldn't too. A student says something like, "Shut up" and I say, "You've never heard me use that word so please don't use that word." So just lead, be a role model by example and then also point out some of those things. I know especially with the boys sports are a big thing. I think Charles Barkley said, "I am not a role model. Parents are role models." Well sometimes parents are too busy doing other things like working or whatever that they need that positive role model and when they see me eight hours a day I'm there for that.

George also believes being a male role does not limit him to what typical males should do. He is quick to point out many of his responsibilities at home to his students.

I always bring up that I do all the cooking at home and everyone is so surprised to hear that. I also joke I want it to taste good that's why I do all of the cooking. It's more of a learning to do what you need to do in order to make your life happy and successful. Growing up if I needed something done I learned to quickly do it myself. So it's just not letting the students rely on someone to do it for them. I think some of the typical things that guys don't normally do like as a household role take on... I try and say at our house everyone does it. I keep telling them if you were my kids I wouldn't do that for you.

George views one of the central responsibilities of being a role model at school is the process of developing independence and responsibility in each student.

Scary to fun. Throughout his fourteen years in the elementary classroom George has kept his physical contact policy consistent. Early in his career George was never bothered by giving his young students hugs because he was teaching in an open classroom setting and his two teammates could see everything happening in his room. He describes having to adjust only slightly to these moments because of his gender.

I really don't have a policy. I try and let them initiate what they are comfortable with. Being a male teacher almost when they are coming in for the hug you've got to give them the sideways hip action. Just because you never know how some things are going to be perceived. Unfortunately that's just how it is nowadays. So it's like a little technique... just a little sideways hug... yeah I am hugging you, but you never know who's going to be watching, who's thinking unfortunately that's what it's come to. Especially the young ones they need that reassurance they need that nurture to bring them along.

Moving around within the early childhood grades George became aware of how his younger students in Kindergarten and first grade enjoyed and initiated hugs more often than his older students.

When George was teaching Kindergarten towards the end of every day he and his two female teammates allocated time for free play centers where students were given access to all three classrooms. At first many of the students in the other two Kindergarten classrooms were hesitant about traveling across to his room during this time.

As they became more comfortable they would venture over to other rooms. I typically had more boys in my room just because I had the stuff. I didn't have the dress up clothes and the dolls stuff. I had the boys' stuff. I typically had more boys' stuff. The other two teachers were female so they would have more of the girls over there. It's just... I had out what I was interested in as a kid. So typically all the boys would be over there with the blocks or the cars or whatever it would be.

George believes this might be the result of how he approached tasks as opposed to how his female teammates did.

I would have to say I'm probably not as nurturing sometimes as maybe some of the female... staff would be ... just because the role I take at home also as a parent. I'm more the... I deal with more of the discipline. My wife does more with the nurturing. You need that good cop, bad cop also too. So I'd say I have to find that fine line, but I'd have to say I am more of the bad cop from time to time, but after you lay down the law at the beginning of the year it's a lot less to deal with throughout the year.

George believes his gender is a positive in early childhood education because certain students can relate to his style, energy, and sports interests.

After getting student behavior and routines established at the beginning of the year George remembers trying to change perceptions students and parents had about him from being an “imposing scary, guy” to a “fun guy”. One early moment he remembers letting his hair down was when he became the pastor for a Kindergarten wedding between the letters Q and U, which involved a ceremony followed by a DJ with music and dancing. Another way this has occurred has been on Halloween.

My first year when I was a teacher assistant I got the idea that... I thought it was pretty funny at the time, but I dressed up as our principal and he was a little bit older a little bit gray on the sides. I was 22 years old so... I colored my hair, wore the suit and everything, put the nametag on. It's just what guys do, just go at each other a little bit all in good fun. My first year when I was in first grade I got the opportunity to dress up as Goldilocks which everyone thought was hilarious and I am sure it will come back to... come back some time when I am retiring those pictures will circulate back around, but for Halloween we typically come up with some sort of theme. We did the Flintstones one year... I was Fred Flintstone.

Then more guys started coming in we did we all dressed up as Tabasco bottles.

Despite his attempt at becoming friendlier in his elementary teaching role, over time George began to recognize his gender created unique situations in his classroom.

When I taught kindergarten we had a very small group that year. I only had 15 students, but the three rooms were totally different. We had the one room that was seemed to be almost the teacher's pet room where everybody was perfect. We had the other room that was I would say probably your typical normal mix of kids and

I had a room with some very difficult boys. It was a pretty challenging group. Luckily it was a small group it was easier to manage, but some of them it was their first school experience coming in to kindergarten. And being my first year teaching kindergarten that was that was a little that was a challenging year.

Looking back at this moment George feels as though he was more equipped to deal with the challenging boys from single parent families raised by their mothers. These same boys over ten years later have reached high school and George is pleased to share they have had both academic and athletic success. Although he viewed having these students as a “blessing in disguise” it came at a cost because George remembers never going home as tired as he did that year teaching Kindergarten. The last four years George has been teaching math to every single third grade student in the Central City Elementary Building, which means students with challenging behaviors are not purposely placed in his classroom because he is a male teacher. Departmentalization offers him the opportunity to work with every student, including those with behavior concerns, although because of his competitive nature George always welcomed the challenge of having these students put on his class list.

Quiet power. Since George was not the first male hired in the building, those before him paved the way for men being accepted as elementary teachers in the small community. When he was hired it was surprising to find out about the three male staff bathrooms in the Central City Elementary Building. He also quickly became aware of the label given to the place where all the male teachers ate lunch together, even though at the time he was eating downstairs with his female teammates. He discusses the history of this sanctuary:

We have a place where we eat lunch called the mancave. It's just a room that isn't used for anything so that's typically where all the guys eat lunch. There were only a couple of us here when I started eating lunch back there. And getting to know the guys and started bouncing off ideas and then when more males were hired we needed a bigger space to expand and we sort of took over this old room and we turned it into the mancave. It's been nice being able to gain from experience of others that have been here because some of the guy teachers have been here almost 20 years. So they went through it being some of the first ones and then slowly we've added a... almost seems like a few more every couple years.

With the addition of more male teachers additional chairs were added to the mancave lunch table. Lunchtime has offered a way for the male teachers in the building to discuss educational topics as well as share and develop personal common interests.

More time together led to the men in the building spending time outside of school. We've had the opportunity to do a lot of bonding in the summertime. This is the 10th year in a row we've done something called mancation. Where we take fishing trips together. Normally about a week long in the summertime."

George is quick to point out when new male teachers are hired they join in on the yearly summer trips and events. Also, retired male teachers continue to participate and even some who have moved on to other school districts come back as well. The men share similar interests like family, video games, sports, and vacations. George believes these events outside of school continue to take place because most of the male teachers in the building are around the same age and have younger kids of their own. With some of the female staff being older and near retirement, George finds himself joking with them about the fact they are old enough to be his mother.

The mancave is a comfortable space with hot sauce on the table and sports and music memorabilia and vacation pictures on the walls. George often uses it as a get away because not too many people come to look for him there if he needs a minute away. Not everyone has always felt this way about the mancave in the building.

At first some of the female staff were a little upset when we started eating lunch by ourselves and we had the mancave to eat lunch and they wanted their own space. I think the grumblings were few and far between. And I know there was talk about a womancation a few years ago. They were going to do one too because we were doing a mancation and I think some of it was maybe a little bit of jealousy because all of us got along so well. And we became close friends in the building and a lot of the other staff it's they punch the clock and they go home.

Versus there are many of us that hang out after school on weekends.

George also views these moments the male teachers spend outside of school together as impacting his experiences in the elementary building.

I think it just shows that even though we may not be in the best moods in our classrooms for whatever is going on we are all happy to be there and we all enjoy being there. They see us having a good time all the time. Even outside it might just be two minutes in the hallway walking by and it seems like laughing about something, but I think they unfortunately they don't.... all the students and all the teams get that, but they have seen it somewhere along the line that they know that we are there and we are really enjoying what we are doing.

George believes, for the most part, all of the male teachers in the building have the same philosophy, which involves a slightly, more laid back approach.

When he first started teaching at the elementary level many people would react with surprise over his choice to work with primary students, but now after fourteen years in the classroom he believes his choice is becoming overall more socially accepted. His first full year teaching first grade the students in his building had an unusual experience with men at the Kindergarten level.

I think it made it a little bit easier because the group I was getting from kindergarten had a male music teacher. They had a male physical education teacher and there is a male principal, which they knew. So even right there they had more exposure to males than I think the typical kindergartener would have. And then one of the teaching assistants...was a teaching assistant for kindergarten and they had him teaching art lessons as well. So they had a male in the classroom. I think there were some nervous parents... I'd say probably more parents as opposed to students because students had seen males all year long in and out of the classroom and around the building, but to have that first male teacher... I think probably the parents were a little bit more skeptical than the students.

With a steady stream of male hires at the Central City Elementary building George has noticed parent reactions change over time. They have become comfortable with the abundance of men in the building and it is now natural to see so many around.

While both parents and students have accepted the men teaching in the Central City Elementary School, George has become aware of how his gender aids him in the elementary setting. The men have become actively involved with the Parent Teacher Organization, which George believes makes parents more comfortable approaching him with ideas for events and fundraisers.

I think I'm very biased, but sometimes people will come to I think the males first for certain things as opposed to the females. We talked about helping out let's say carrying things, but then again we also when we want to say something a lot of times people stop and listen. And we don't complain very much and sometimes we say very little especially in staff meetings, but when we do it's a very valid point. And a lot of people will just stop and take notice of that.

George has also experienced similar situations with male administrators.

I think sometimes we get preferential treatment on technology because we are using it. We'll ask for it and then we'll problem solve on our own to fix what's wrong. Or I'll get new tables just because someone is not using them and I'll go carry them myself up to my room. So I think we do get privilege with that. I think some of that power is maybe more of a quiet power. You don't really necessary need to go off and show it off, but its there. Sort of hard to put into words.

Another time a male administrator unexpectedly arrived in his room, talked with students about an activity on the computer and the following day George received a phone call from him about attending a technology conference. Over time the male teachers in the building were able to profit from their gender status and relationships with leaders in both school administration and the Parent Teacher Organization.

George is also aware of how the mostly White Christian community paired with nearly an entirely White elementary teaching staff positions him and the male teachers in a comfortable situation. They all identify as heterosexual, White, male teachers and all have children of the own. With over fourteen years in the district George has been around long enough to see the majority of the community remain in place and even return later

because the families have “become comfortable with what they’re used to.” He compares the Central City School District to his own childhood.

The school I grew up in was very similar in size and SES status. It felt like home. I guess the best way to say it. My growing up I was more rural. This is more urban. The class sizes. The number of teachers. How everyone got along and knew everybody. It was very similar to how I grew up. So it just felt very comfortable.

With a mostly blue collar demographic George believes the higher education he has attained, compared to many of the families in the community, puts him “in a little bit more of a position of power.”

George describes the Central City School District as a community that is “very hard to break into unless you have some sort of tie.” In his time at the elementary building he has noticed, “the closeness of the community that keeps who they want in, but also sometimes pushes people away they don’t want in.” One situation jumps out:

We had a family who’s so excited to be invited to a Halloween party this past year. And it’s one of the families that’s a non-White family and the first time they were invited to an outside social function. And I heard it was a little awkward because they were almost too appreciative of being there. Kept saying, “Everything was perfect. And thank you, thank you, thank you.” And I think they were trying too hard to break into the group of people.”

George also sees these types of situations play out in his classroom with groups of students from different community neighborhoods and when new tuition students arrive from outside the district.

Sticking around. Back when George was beginning his career in early childhood education his male principal offered him support and advice when it was time for him to think about beginning his graduate degree.

He said, “You would be a great administrator.” At that point I said, “I enjoy teaching right now.” Then he also said, “You’d also be a great mentor.” And that sounded more appealing to me than being an administrator because I’d be in the classroom working with another teacher or working with the students and teacher but even that... it’s... I don’t have my own classroom.

George recognized many of the daily responsibilities of being an administrator like paper work and meetings would take him away from what he enjoyed the most about being a teacher, which is consistently being around young students. Over his fourteen years at the Central City Elementary Building George has worked with many male elementary teachers. He has been around those planning on staying in early childhood education and those planning on moving on to administration.

Like I said there’s elementary teachers that are here for putting their time in while they are getting their principal license and are ready to move on. So I think that you have to be the right person, then also have to be in a good situation too.

George avoided the administration route for his graduate work and remembers debating between focusing on a degree in technology or special education. He ultimately settled with special education because it offered him an easier path to finding a job, but looking back wishes he would have gone the technology route.

Early on in his teaching career in the Central City School District George was given the opportunity to coach sports at the high school, which he views as one of the turning points for remaining in the early childhood classroom. Teaching in a small district

quickly offered him the chance to coach high school and middle school athletics for nine years.

One thing I would say is I am very competitive. I bring that competition into the classroom. Whether it is class vs. class. Student vs. student. Central City vs. whatever other school. Let's bring the competition into it. The healthy competition helps them strive to be their best. Some of those students I coached that I taught at the elementary, we had a good connection, but it was a little strange because they thought of me as that elementary teacher. And I am like no I am your coach now. I am not going to be that little nice teacher in the classroom. Different set of expectations so you've got to think of me as that coach now not as that elementary teacher.

By the time his son reached an age where he was old enough to begin playing organized sports George replaced his high school coaching role with coaching him. George now spends much of his time outside of school traveling to both his daughter's and son's sporting events and practices, which continue to provide stories for students in his classroom and themes for lessons.

Looking back at his journey to the elementary level George can easily see himself being happy in a middle or high school classroom, but his patience and sense of humor were a much better fit with young students. Although George was unexpectedly guided into early childhood education, he continues to experience moments that validate his career choice.

I just think my personality relates well to this age group. Even when I am out at social functions like family gatherings and all the little kids elementary age seem to bond with me. I was at my own kid's end of the year parties. I had kids that I

don't even know that were hanging on me. And they just feel that connection somehow. They weren't doing it with the other parent helpers they were there hanging on me. I was telling my wife... I said, "Did you notice that?"... She said, "Yeah that's a little strange." ... Whatever my personality is I guess they feel comfortable with me even though they haven't met me.

George enjoys the chaos and unexpectedness that working at the primary level brings every day. It has forced him to be flexible, to laugh at himself, and just roll with any situation that presents itself. He shares one such situation:

We were doing ah a unit on measurement and we ended up making muffins. We used the ovens in the cafeteria to make these blueberry muffins and we were supposed to follow step by step directions. Everything. Our rooms ended up looking like a scene from I Love Lucy with flour all over the place and everything. It was so chaotic. So much fun! You know I don't see a lot of people being able to put up with... this is what its going to be for the day. Just get ready with it. Some looked horrible, tasted great. Some looked great, tasted horrible. And it's just one of those... a fun day. I can see some people not being able to get out of their comfort zones and just do something like that.

His attitude and demeanor in the classroom allowed George to survive nine years of changing grade levels and different teaching responsibilities, but has also left him and many of the male teachers in the building positioned in the upper elementary grades, third grade through fifth grade, teaching departmentalized science, social studies, and math.

Conclusion. George found a home in early childhood education with help from his high school and college-coaching mentors. His first fourteen years at the primary level, all at Central City Elementary School, have offered him the opportunity to work

with students in kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and third grade. Within his elementary experiences he has taught all subjects to a class of students, looped with students for two consecutive years, and currently teaches math to an entire grade of students. His frequent movement and change in teaching responsibilities heavily influenced his relationships with students as well as how he negotiated identity. Teaching in a small school district with a heavy presence of men offered him coaching opportunities and a comfortable environment to construct masculinities and develop a reputation in the community and with school administrators. He has avoided a stereotypical male move to administration, despite advice from his principal, because he loves to be around students in the classroom and enjoys coming in to teach every day. Throughout his time in early childhood education much has changed, except his desire to remain in the classroom instructing elementary students because he “can’t see himself doing anything else.”

CHAPTER V

STORY INTERPRETATIONS

“I’m afraid men are not always quite as clever as they think they are.

You will learn that when you get a bit older, my girl.” (Dahl & Blake, 1988)

Introduction

During data analysis, it became important that participant stories be highlighted in their own space. Arranging the interpretations in Chapter 5 after participant stories in Chapter 4 offered a way for readers to get close to participant experiences and to develop reflections before hearing directly from the researcher. It also provided a chance to address positionality and subjectivity by maintaining distance between participant stories and researcher interpretation. Throughout Chapter 5 crosscutting themes are explored comparing and contrasting the unique experiences of Frank, Jerry, and George. These themes were developed applying the theoretical framework (Figure 1). These comparisons resulted in six themes, which share the various gender issues, opportunities, and barriers in each of the men’s professional, situational, and personal moments, over time, teaching in early childhood education.

At times the themes presented in this chapter will overlap because elements of Frank, Jerry, and George’s professional experiences were influenced by both identity and

masculinities, which were closely connected. The themes include the following: career choice and turning points (choosing early childhood education and remaining in the classroom), no fear, no promotion (becoming comfortable working with young children and avoiding a path to administration), gender divide (effect of staff gender proportions), advantaged and disadvantaged (benefits and limits of gender), balancing caring and curriculum (carving out time for nurturing masculinities amid high-stakes testing), and comfortably, uncomfortable masculinities (upholding hegemonic masculinity with sport and competition while becoming aware of subordinate and marginalized masculinities). Themes are highlighted within each individual's story and explored across the three narratives.

Career Choice and Turning Points

Luck and timing played a critical part in the arrival of Frank, Jerry, and George in early childhood education. Not one of them set out on their career journey planning on working with young children, yet today their sustained experience makes them stand out in a field often expecting men to leave for administration positions. Frank and George always envisioned being a teacher, but Jerry started off elsewhere. They all have different reasons for choosing to work with young students, while sharing some similar turning points for remaining in the early childhood classroom.

Frank, after a few years at the high school, fell into a Kindergarten through fifth grade general music teaching position because he was unhappy about a new assignment forcing him to add choir in addition to his marching band duties. Only after prolonged exposure to young students did he even consider staying at the elementary level as an option. Prior to these moments, he viewed his time at the elementary building as a chore or a duty and one of the lowest points of his career in teaching. Now, with over eighteen

years experience at the elementary level, he identifies two turning points for remaining. One turning point involved negotiating his personal identity as a musician with his situational identity, which involved learning to use his talents to nurture the talents and passion of young students. Another occurred after he finished his graduate degree in instructional technology and became excited about a technology position in his building possibly opening up. Missing out on an opportunity to change positions rejuvenated his attitude and mindset in the music classroom and jump-started his professional development to stay current with trends in early childhood education. Frank has remained teaching at the early childhood level over the last eighteen years because he enjoys his time with young students as well as his teaching environment. His close relationships with male colleagues at his building have kept him happy at school and continue to make it easy to arrive in the morning.

Unlike Frank and George, Jerry grew up spending time around children baby-sitting. Despite these early moments he did not identify teaching as a career option. He initially toyed with a career in business, landed in landscaping and construction jobs for a short time, and eventually began working towards a career in early childhood education. During these career stops Jerry flipped the male breadwinner gender script by following his wife around the country while she pursued educational degrees and prestigious jobs. At one point he was a stay at home dad during the day and a student at night. Jerry has continued to remain in early childhood education the last fourteen years because his salary is “more than acceptable” and he has also been able to pick up supplemental contracts as a leader of after school clubs and organizations. He believes it would be hard to leave his current elementary position because of the relationships he has built within and outside of school with the male teachers in his building.

George was ahead of the curve in making the decision to work in early childhood education. While Frank and Jerry both had late beginnings, George made the switch from secondary Social Studies to the primary level during his undergraduate degree. Following the advice from his college athletic coach, George visited his elementary school for a field observation and decided to make the change. He would come to realize his patience, sense of humor, and calm demeanor were a better fit with young students. Looking back, George would have been happy at the middle or high school level, but has realized his personality best fits with the early childhood age group. Getting an early opportunity to coach high school sports, with the other male coaches, was one of the main turning points for keeping him content in early childhood education.

With their first teaching experiences at the early childhood level, veteran female mentors insulated George and Jerry from difficult early situations in the classroom. They both counted on these mentoring figures for a wide range of advice while they were dealing with the challenges of maintaining their own classroom. Frank initially began at the high school level with less support from mentors because he was the only high school marching band teacher; however, he identified multiple staff members he used as a resource while he settled in full-time. All three men benefited from positive professional networks in their first teaching placements, which aided their early negotiation of identity and construction of masculinities and helped them avoid attrition.

Frank, Jerry, and George arrived through unique paths to the feminized world of early childhood education. They continue to stand out because of their intention to remain in the classroom working with young children. Working in an elementary building with supportive teachers and administrators as well as having a competitive salary continue to be factors in their decision to stay. Opportunities with other men, inside and outside

school, also offer them an outlet to balance a range of masculinities. While older female teachers helped them settle in to the building, Frank and George slowly pulled away from their female teammates, gravitating to the expanding group of men. Their common personal interests and similar family status allowed all three of them to build close personal and professional relationships with the other men teaching in the building, which continues to be a comfortable space for them to teach at the early childhood level.

No Fear, No Promotion

Although Frank, Jerry, and George were well received by the administration and staff, they were not welcomed with open arms to the Central City Elementary Building by everyone. Frank arrived a few years before Jerry and George, but at the time it was not unusual to have a male teaching general music. During his early elementary teaching moments Frank was worried how the students would react to his facial hair and towering height. By the time Jerry and George arrived, there were already two full-time male early childhood grade level teachers in the building, so the reactions varied. Jerry remembers a parent line out his door for Open House and early questions about his pedagogical decisions, while George noticed skepticism at first. Over time concerns about their gender faded, but have not disappeared. Rather than being a Kindergarten or third grade teacher, even after prolonged experience, Frank, Jerry, and George continue to be referred to as the male teacher at their respective grade level.

Frank has been teaching music at the Central City Elementary Building for eighteen years, with Jerry and George joining him the past fourteen. With the combination of experience in the classroom and the addition of more male teachers Frank, Jerry, and George have seen parents' surprised reactions and questions about their intentions working with young children nearly disappear. While students quickly became

accustomed to the abundance of men teaching in the building, parents in the community took a little bit longer to see it as a comfortable educational situation. Similarly, Jerry's male gender also caused fears and suspicions during his three years teaching Pre-Kindergarten in a preschool out of state, but over time he was able to develop a positive reputation with parents in the community. Time and large numbers of other men in the Central City Elementary Building not only kept Frank, Jerry, and George in the classroom, but also allowed them to develop trust with the community.

In terms of physical contact with students, when Frank was hired following college he was cautious about giving hugs to high school females who were only four years younger. Since moving to the elementary building he has always welcomed hugs and never feared them at all. Time, space, and gender proportions have impacted how Jerry and George approached physical contact with students at the Central City Elementary Building. Even after fourteen years, George has yet to develop a policy and allows students to initiate what they are comfortable with. Early moments of teaching in an open classroom with no walls, next to his female teammates, helped ease any worries he might have had about physical contact with students. Jerry never avoided hugs, but remembers being hesitant when approached by students. This later changed when his male superintendent gave him the green light to hug his students. Today he is confident giving hugs to students, but if he had to start out at a new district he views giving hugs as a risky endeavor. Despite now being comfortable with giving hugs to young students Frank, Jerry, and George continue to be aware of where they are positioned when they hug young students trying to avoid short students landing a head near their crotch. These touching moments with young children still set off sensitive, internal alarms in Frank,

Jerry, and George, which is not the case for the female teachers they work with in early childhood education.

Extended time in the early childhood classroom allowed Frank, Jerry and George to initially pass the subtle background checks of parents in the community. Becoming parents themselves at home led to stakeholders in the community viewing them not only as male early childhood teachers, but also as dads. All three men being White, heterosexual, and married offered parents a comfortable situation, since the men arrived at school from established nuclear families like their own. This status, coupled with the staff proportions in the building, quickly removed any questions, fears or concerns about the intentions of the men teaching in the building. With dad status at home, giving hugs at school became something socially acceptable, rather than questioned.

Frank, Jerry and George did not mention avoiding administration as a turning point for remaining in the early childhood classroom; however, all three men were approached by male administrators about planning a move up to leadership positions. For Frank these conversations involved being told he would make a great leader and even included his dad strongly suggesting that he return to school to become a principal because of the money. After being unsuccessful in attempting to persuade George to begin working on a graduate degree in administration, his male administrators later returned to convince him to become a mentor for other teachers in the building. Jerry was also approached with an unconvincing argument that getting his principal's license is what men do. When approached by administrators Frank, Jerry, and George were able to turn down their advice because of their love of working directly with young students on a daily basis coupled with their disdain for the responsibilities associated with being an administrator. They did not see administration as the required step they must take because

of the abundance of men working with them at school on a daily basis. Being surrounded by other men, some planning on staying and some who have moved up to administration, offered them alternative career trajectories. Seeing these illuminated options and possibilities offered them a way to confidently sidestep pressure from their male principal. With the arrival of the last two female principals, these options disappeared within the building.

Lengthy time in the classroom has benefitted Frank, Jerry, and George at the Central City Elementary Building. Their White, married-with-children family status has allowed them to establish a positive reputation in the community with parents and dimmed the spotlight on them working with young children. It has also given the men an opportunity to interact and socialize with other men who are planning on making a career out of teaching young children. Seeing friends stay in the classroom and not leave for administration has offered them an alternative to the advice they were receiving from their male principal. With parent concern and skepticism about their male gender having eroded over time, Frank, Jerry, and George were left with a comfortable teaching environment in which to make the decision to avoid leadership positions and remain teaching young students.

Gender Divide

For the majority of their time teaching at the Central City Elementary Building Frank, Jerry, and George have found themselves in a unique situation because they have not been positioned as token men surrounded by almost an entire staff of women, which is often the case. The regular education staff gender proportions at their building over the last eight years have ranged from 25% to nearly 40% men, which means they were not positioned as a severe numerical minority. Teaching on a staff approaching a gender

balance helped facilitate the acceptance of Frank, Jerry, George and the other men in the building as teachers of young children by parents in the community. Their large numbers also allowed the men in the building to carve out their own space inside and outside of the building and separate themselves from the female staff.

When Frank started at the Central City Elementary Building eighteen years ago he initially sought a lunch sanctuary with one or two other men to protect his masculine conversation topics from the ears of female teachers. At the time there were only a few men in the building and the female secretaries jokingly began calling the group of men the He Man Women Haters Club. George and Jerry would eventually join Frank for lunch after their older female mentors retired and they were moved to a grade level with new teammates. With the addition of more men the rest of the staff would eventually label the growing presence of men teaching in the building the manclub. Later the men commandeered a small classroom for a lunch space that would be called the mancave. At first Jerry and George recall the female teachers were a little bit jealous about the separate male space and joked about how to gain access, but they would eventually grow to accept it. When the group of men teaching in the Central City Elementary Building were called He Man Women Haters Club and named the manclub, they were just beginning to navigate social relations, which laid the foundation for future patterns of hegemonic masculinity.

Today, Frank and Jerry continue to be surprised about their lunch space not being taken away despite a shortage of space and the hiring of the two female principals. Over time it almost became universally accepted that new male hires were expected to eat lunch upstairs in the mancave. This space has offered Frank, Jerry, and George and the other male teachers an opportunity to discuss educational topics as well as common

interests like beer, sports, and fishing. These lunch conversations led the men in the building to develop friendships inside and outside of school. Shortly after the mancave was created Frank and Jerry, along with three other men teaching in the building, traveled out of state on a summer fishing trip they called mancation. The next summer George was able to attend and nine years later they have annually continued this summer ritual. These yearly trips even led to the women in the building organizing a one-time event in the summer, attempting to create a similar bonding situation. Having a separate lunch space and traveling on yearly summer vacations also continued to elevate the gender division in the building.

When Jerry was going through the interview process to be hired at the Central City Elementary Building his relationship with another male teaching assistant led to moments where he believed they were both in a gendered competition against the females to get the job. Since getting hired Frank, Jerry, and George have never felt like they were in competition with the female teachers in the building because their gender sets them apart. Jerry recalls laughing with the other male teachers in the building about the steady hiring of men to the building and in contrast remembers the rumblings from the female teachers because the men were coming close to being a majority. Instead of just taking up one table in the corner of the room at staff meetings, gradually the men were sitting together at multiple tables and were starting to become a strong and dominant voice. George believes this led administrators and the building Parent Teacher Organization to begin approaching male teachers first with ideas and new programs as opposed to the female teachers. Jerry remembers his male principal placing journal articles inside his school mailbox in an attempt to help him change the opinions of his female teammates

with their homework policies. These behind-the-scenes moments placed the men in precarious, yet powerful leadership positions, which were noticed across the building.

The joking from some of the female staff changed to resentment when many of the men teaching in the building were asked to design technology presentations for the staff during multiple in-service days throughout an entire school year. Jerry remembers unpleasant reactions from the female staff when sharing how he used technology in his classroom. He remembers being on pins and needles during the presentation because only the male teachers were presenting. Later Jerry and Frank were given opportunities by their principal to present at conferences and were nominated for prestigious awards. Jerry remembers thinking his male principal should be spreading out these honors rather than hand picking the men in the building.

Throughout his time at the Central City Elementary Building when Jerry has taught at a grade level with two female teammates he has always felt like his gender put him in a comfortable place. He felt as though he had an advantage over them because he was male and his gender offered him a heightened status with the parents in the community. Men and technology became synonymous, which created a powerful gender stereotype that placed his classroom under the spotlight in the building and the community. In the building he and the other male teachers were asked to share how they used technology in their classrooms, while in the community it led to parents requesting their child be placed in the male teacher's classroom at each grade level. Since Frank works with every student in his music position parent requests did not put him in the same uncomfortable position as Jerry and George. Jerry remembers when parents in the community viewed it as a badge of honor to have their child placed in the male teacher's classroom and when their child was not they felt cheated. Since Jerry and George have

both moved to departmentalized teaching assignments the parent requests have disappeared and placed Jerry's mind at ease. These requests and technology stereotypes impacted how Frank, Jerry, and George negotiated identity and constructed masculinities.

Back when staff gender proportions were at 40% Jerry felt as though the men were dominating the building for a while, but with two male teachers leaving to pursue administration positions the scales have swung in the other direction. Throughout their time at the Central City Elementary Building, Frank, Jerry, and George's gender has been put on display even if they did not want it to be. Frank, Jerry, and George did not seek out opportunities to do technology presentations to their building staff, position themselves to receive awards, or lobby to travel for presentations at national conferences. They willingly accepted these benefits and opportunities and did not think to offer them to their female teammates. They have also been expecting to give up their sacred mancave eating space for the past couple years. Eating in a separate space, building relationships together outside of school, earning the trust of administrators, and being labeled as technology experts in the classroom, all contributed to a gender division in their building. Ultimately, the events resulting from the increased number of men teaching in the Central City elementary building changed the power dynamics.

At first Frank, Jerry, and George describe the gender division leading to jokes from the female teachers, followed later by resentment and jealousy. Currently these feelings have faded because many of their gendered advantages have disappeared recently with staff and administration changes in the building. The gender proportions have not only affected the experiences of Frank, Jerry, and George, but also the entire staff. The arrival of more men offered them a powerful position that is slowly dissolving with the addition of female administrators and fewer male teachers in the building.

Advantaged and Disadvantaged

During their time teaching at the Central City Elementary Building Frank, Jerry, and George have complicity benefitted from their masculinities as well as been limited by them as well (Connell, 2005). Their male gender has placed them in a powerful position because it has been coupled with the unusually large numbers of men teaching in their building, an all male technology department, and nearly all male administrators. Being a male early childhood teacher has opened doors and opportunities, while at the same time forced them to adhere to time honored, traditional gender scripts.

Before Frank, Jerry, and George arrived at the Central City Elementary Building a few token male teachers were able to convince the administration to designate separate male restrooms. George remembers arriving and being shocked at having three different male restrooms in the building because this was not the case at the other early childhood buildings where he had completed his teacher training. Only after a year as teaching assistants George and Jerry both stood out during the hiring process when they applied for the full-time teaching positions at the Central City Elementary Building. Hearing about 700 or 800 applicants the year they applied for the job, with only a handful of those being men, they both believe their male gender aided them in the hiring process. Also, George benefitted from having an interest in coaching middle school and high school sports. Both Jerry and George would later realize the administration team had a plan to balance the staff gender proportions at the elementary building.

Frank, Jerry, and George began to benefit from a pattern of gender binaries being established in their early childhood setting. One example was when being fluent with technology in the classroom became the calling card for the majority of the men teaching at the Central City Elementary Building. This reputation began with administrators

selecting Frank, Jerry, and George and some of the other men teaching in the building to be in exclusive technology academy groups. They were also repeatedly provided opportunities to pilot new technology to the district. Following academy training, both Jerry and George received brand new laptop carts for their classrooms. When the entire staff received new laptops, Frank was able to convince the technology department to order him a different brand of computer for his music room. Jerry refers to these technology doors being opened for the men in the building as a “channeling of the good old boys club,” which offered the men a unique privilege and linked their male gender with being technologically savvy, even if they did not want it to be a focal point of their identity.

These gender divides did not always work to the advantage of Frank, Jerry, and George. Every spring in the Central City Elementary Building teachers at every grade level create class lists for the following year. The administration and school psychologist take these suggestions and make the final decisions on which individual students will be assigned to teachers. George and Frank each had separate moments where they realized disruptive students were consistently being placed in their classroom because of their male characteristics. George reacted to this practice by accepting the yearly challenge and was able to develop an attitude that he was more equipped to deal with the challenging boys from single parent families than the nurturing female teachers. Having difficult students constantly placed in his room led Jerry to question if he was meeting the academic and social needs of all of his students. George and Jerry were both reluctant to ask for help when dealing with these challenging students. Frank also finds himself in music class trying to deal with challenging students on his own rather than relying on help from classroom teachers. Solving discipline problems autonomously led to the

continuous practice of placing challenging students in Jerry and George's classroom every year. It finally stopped when George and Jerry were moved to departmentalized math positions and began teaching every student at their respective grade levels. This move not only relieved the pressure from parent requests, but also allowed all teachers at each grade level to work with challenging students, not just George and Jerry.

The classroom is not the only place where Frank, Jerry, George and the other men teaching in the building were positioned as father figures. Frank was asked by the district psychologist to volunteer his time before school to mentor boys in third, fourth, and fifth grade. These weekly individual sessions were designed to build relationships through conversations, which occurred when Frank helped the boys with homework or even played video games with them. Tapping into the large presence of men teaching in the building the school guidance counselor created an after school program to provide help to fourth grade parents dealing with challenging boys. Events were planned throughout the year at bowling alleys, arcades, recreation centers, and parks where the boys would play with the male teachers and male principal, while the parents would listen to a guest speaker about a specific topic. This program positioned Frank, Jerry, and George as role models for young boys in the school district.

Every year during Open House, Curriculum Night, Grandparents' Day, Muffins for Moms, and Doughnuts for Dads, Frank, Jerry, and George often hear from guests about how wonderful it is to have so many males at their building. Parents feel this way in the Central City School District because they view the male teachers as father figures, disciplinarians, and role models. This stereotype has also been represented in the actions of female teachers in the building and impacted the day-to-day experiences of Frank, Jerry, and George. All three men consider themselves male role models; Frank and Jerry

feel as though they were pushed into this position, while George sees it as his male responsibility. Frank is aware of the traits associated with male role models like strong, firm, and commanding, but during his time in early childhood education worked himself away from these towards a more nurturing and softer role model for his students. He reluctantly accepted requests to work with struggling boys before school in the morning and participate in after school programs as well. Every year when challenging students were consistently placed in his classroom Jerry felt the weight of being a male role model with his students. He is known as a nice guy in the community, but is also quick to point out that there is no difference in what he can do with young children compared to female teachers. Due to only growing up with his dad George feels as though being a male role model is important for all of his students, not just those coming from single parent families. He places a high value on modeling positive behaviors at school for his students, while also pointing out his laundry and cooking skills at home.

Although technology became the calling card for Frank, Jerry, and George, parents in the community also attached strong high academic expectations to the reputation of the men in the building. They were labeled as technology experts highly invested in core academic activities, compared with the stereotypes associated with the more nurturing female teachers in the building. In addition, Jerry and George were both moved to positions where they found themselves only teaching math, which is considered a stereotypical male position. When they volunteered for before- and after- school mentoring programs they were situated as role models in the community and the classroom. Both technology and male role model designations became a powerful way for associating Frank, Jerry, George and the other men teaching in the Central City Elementary Building with traditional gender stereotypes like disciplinarian.

Frank, Jerry, and George have benefitted from more than just an abundance of male restrooms during their time at the Central City Elementary Building. While Frank was able to easily convince the administration to move him over to the elementary level, Jerry and George were aided by their male gender when applying for full-time positions. In addition to receiving their own all male lunchroom, the men teaching in the building were linked to technology through presentations, academies, and pilot projects. They unquestionably accepted prestigious awards, opportunities for presenting at national conferences, and a steady flow of technology into their classroom, complicit in their participation of particular roles that reinforced gender stereotypes. These moments led to Frank, Jerry, and George being labeled as technology experts, which influenced their identity negotiation. Over time they benefitted from the masculinities associated with these labels, but have also found it difficult to move away from them as well.

Balancing Curriculum and Caring

During the day Frank, Jerry, and George are men teaching at the Central City Elementary Building, while at night they are dads at home. Even before having children of their own, building strong, personal relationships with their students was at the top of their priority list every year. The arrival of their own children influenced their professional identity and masculinities at school by making them more nurturing and understanding with their young students at school, characteristics contrary to the traditional stereotypes associated with male role models. With the current high-stakes testing climate at the Central City Elementary building Frank, Jerry and George find themselves caught between building caring and nurturing relationships with students and rigorously preparing them for academic assessments.

Even before he arrived at the elementary level it was important for Frank to be liked by his students. After competing with the retired band director for the affection of his high school students, Frank arrived at the elementary level and reveled in the excitement and love he was receiving from his young students. Since he is in a fine arts teaching position he is shielded from the high-stakes testing currently a big part of the students lives at the Central City Elementary Building. Seeing the effects of these tests on both students and fellow staff members, Frank uses his music classroom as a safe place for his students to explore and be creative. Through a calm demeanor and positive attitude he designs his room to be a comfortable alternative to the regular, stressful, education classroom. This approach has changed over time from yelling at his high school band students to eventually using more of a nurturing approach with his elementary students. Having his own children helped Frank develop more patience at school and dial back some of his intimidating actions in class. He even adjusted his own masculinities by comparing himself to some of the other male teachers in the Central City Elementary Building. Seeing other men in the building being successful in class with a nurturing approach with students has reassured him that this is an appropriate path to take with elementary students. Frank has even become comfortable with a reputation in the community as a softer male role model.

When George was teaching kindergarten he was always able to find time to have conversations with students, which set the foundation for personal relationships. Even when he was looping between second and third grade he was able to grow close with both students and parents working with them for two years. After switching to a departmentalized math position in third grade, coupled with new educational policies and responsibilities, he finds himself replacing some of the personal time with students for

test preparation. The last couple of years he has negotiated the dilemma of doing what he wants with his third grade students with what needs to be done to have them score well on the high-stakes tests. With children of his own at home George was able to more fully understand the perspectives of his students at school. Dealing with his own children at home George recognized the importance of choosing his words carefully as well as when to raise his voice, which is only a couple times a year at school. He sees himself as less nurturing than some of the female teachers he works with because his wife handles the nurturing moments at home, where he is more of the disciplinarian. Nonetheless he is not content with being the scary or imposing male teacher at school and attempts to dispel this reputation through humor in his classroom and personal stories like doing laundry or cooking dinner at home.

Jerry welcomes students to his room with a safe and stimulating classroom environment. Making them feel at home is the first step towards building deep and lasting educational impressions with them. His steady and calm demeanor offers students consistent expectations in his classroom. When Jerry has been placed in grades without high-stakes standardized testing he is relaxed and plans creative and experimental lessons. Moments teaching in testing grades have led him to search for as well as design a curriculum challenging enough to prepare his students to be successful during testing week. Although parents in the community view him as a nice guy, he strives to not only be the favorite teacher of his students, but also one of their most challenging as well. The arrival of his own children changed the way he communicated with parents during conference time, especially dads. With a heavy sports background, Jerry had to learn how to handle situations where his elementary students were crying and needed nurturing attention. He was not a natural coddler because, like George, Jerry's wife has handled

that responsibility at home. At school Jerry has more physical contact with his students than he has with his own children at home. Over time he has developed a compassionate and empathetic disposition towards his students by envisioning how he would want his own children treated at school.

Frank, Jerry, and George were all originally associated with being strong disciplinarians by parents in the community because of their gender, but have come to be viewed differently by administrators and teachers in the building who see them teaching every day. Since they arrived at the Central City Elementary building they have constructed a range of masculinities in the classroom. Having their own children at home influenced how Frank, Jerry, and George treated students at school. Rather than passing these nurturing opportunities on to other female teachers or administrators, they learned how to nurture young students in their classroom. At the time it was not something they were comfortable with or had experience consistently handling at home. This process was aided not only by having their own children at home, but also by the proportion of men teaching in the building and their sustained experience in early childhood education. Being surrounded by other men, Frank was able to see a range of masculinities being constructed, not just traditional, stereotypical male ones. He was able to move away from using intimidation in his classroom and begin emphasizing nurturing techniques.

It is clear the current high stakes testing environment has influenced the situational identity negotiation of Frank, Jerry, and George. As teachers in testing grades, George and Jerry continue to balance constructing competitive and demanding curriculum in class with positioning themselves as a fun or favorite teacher of students. Frank also values being adored by his elementary students. His classroom structure and curriculum are designed to create a learning environment where his students are shielded

from the pressures they experience in core testing subjects. Finding a balance between high academic expectations and building caring relationships with students continues to impact Frank, Jerry, and George's identity negotiation as well as how they construct masculinities.

Comfortably, Uncomfortable Masculinities

Within their experiences at the Central City Elementary Building Frank, Jerry, and George have found ways inside and outside of the classroom to link themselves with athletics. Although they have displayed a range of interests during their time working with young children, sports and competition continue to be a part of their identity and influence their masculinities. Frank, Jerry, and George benefit from the hegemonic masculinity associated with their male/heterosexual/White/married status, but they have not equally shared in this male power. With extended time working in the Central City School District they have been complicit in benefitting from their association with a dominant masculinity, while also become aware of subordinate and marginalized masculinities.

A few years ago when the Student Council advisor position became available Frank quickly jumped at the opportunity. One of the big responsibilities of this position was to organize the Central City Elementary Building field day activities. He completely overhauled field day and replaced many of the activities with sporting events where students were competing for first, second and third place awards. After his first successful field day he received positive feedback from students, teachers, and parents. The next few weeks his male administrators even repeatedly gave him high praise for being a strong leader. Competition also exists inside Frank's music classroom where his students are learning to play songs on their recorder to earn their next karate recorder

belt. Each student has a picture on the class bulletin board where they are moving from colored belt to colored belt as they complete each song. Working in an early childhood building with a heavy presence of other men Frank continues to find himself in a silent, unspoken motivational competition with the other male teachers, but not with the female teachers. He often compares himself to the other men in the building and having them around pushes him to be a better teacher.

Outside of school, away from his White/male/heterosexual friends at the Central City Elementary Building, Frank is aware of subordinate masculinities. His friends from high school often joke about him being gay simply because he is an early childhood music teacher. When he attends the state music educator's conference he is exposed to less stereotypically male music teachers. Comparing himself to the other men offers him a way to ensure he is not projecting a gay image himself. These moments being exposed to subordinate masculinities reaffirm to Frank that he has found a comfortable place among many male teaching friends in his early childhood building. Within Frank's time in early childhood education it is clear being heterosexual has removed suspicion from his intentions working with children, but homophobic perceptions continue to be something he must negotiate even after over twenty years in the classroom.

Competition has always been a big part of Jerry's experiences in early childhood education. During his first year at the Central City Elementary Building he felt as though he was in a competition with the female teaching assistants when attempting to secure a full-time position. It continued when he was hired because he had lost his unique, token status he experienced during teacher training. He now finds himself teaching at a grade level with multiple men in the grades below him and as a result he continues to feel a push from them and strives to be something better than the last male teacher.

His extended time teaching young children has made Jerry aware of both subordinate and marginalized masculinities. During his early time in Pre-Kindergarten Jerry was explicitly asked if he was gay, which at the time he thought was unprofessional. Recently Frank passed the Student Council Advisor position on to Jerry. This has been an easy transition for Jerry, but something he seemed to settle for because of being denied other leadership opportunities. The past few years he tried unsuccessfully to become an assistant basketball coach at the middle school and high school level. Despite his own athletic background he has been unable to secure a coaching spot because of his time associated with the subordinate masculinities of early childhood education and his nice guy reputation that does not fit the hegemonic standard. In his current position Jerry has witnessed moments where being gay was marginalized in the Central City School District and believes the blue collar community would struggle with an openly gay or Black male teacher. Recently his own son announced he was gay and Jerry worries about his future in a small, close-minded school district. The hegemonic standard that offers Jerry power and privilege as a male teacher at the Central City Elementary Building has also limited his opportunities.

George decided to become an early childhood education major because of high school and college coaching mentors. Gender and coaching contributed to George being hired full-time at the Central City Elementary Building. He quickly had opportunities to coach at the middle and high school levels after getting hired, before he became associated with subordinate masculinities at the elementary level. In his early childhood classroom George frequently uses sports analogies to motivate his students and local athletic teams as themes for units and projects. He consistently brings competition into his classroom by having students compete with each other to memorize math facts.

Unlike Frank and Jerry, George does not feel like he is in a competition with the other men in the building.

During college George learned to ignore the negative comments from his male friends and roommates about his early childhood education major choice. Throughout his career he has been able to deflect the emasculating reactions to his feminized career choice by quickly sharing his masculine coaching role. Although he is comfortable giving young students hugs, he distances himself from being as nurturing as many of the female teachers in his building by emphasizing independence with his students in class. When he was teaching Kindergarten, George created gender divisions by supplying his room only with Legos, blocks, and cars during center time, while his female teammates offered dress-up clothes and dolls. This worked to further entrench gender stereotypes with both his students in class and parents in the community.

By connecting themselves to sports and competition Frank, George, and Jerry have been complicit in benefitting from gender binaries regarding leadership in the building. This alignment has perpetuated male stereotypes and continues to position the men teachers as role models for boys in early childhood education. For Frank and Jerry, teaching with many other men pressed them into an unspoken competition for not only student affection, but also to differentiate themselves from the other male teachers in the building. Within the Central City Elementary Building being a male teacher is not out of the ordinary; however, over time outside of the building Frank, Jerry, and George have become aware of the subordinate status of their feminized career choice. Just having these sporting interests was not enough for Jerry to shed his early childhood subordinate label and work his way into secondary coaching positions. All three men fit the culturally traditional norm identifying as White, middle-class, and heterosexual. Being closely

affiliated with sport and competition creates a further division between Frank, Jerry, George and the female teachers in the Central City Elementary Building, while pushing their associations with nurturing masculinities further away.

Conclusion

Frank, Jerry, and George all arrived in early childhood education through different routes. For the majority of their time teaching young children they have been surrounded by a large presence of other men at the Central City Elementary Building. Their relationships with the other men teachers in the building not only created a comfortable teaching environment, but also led to their acceptance with community members. It also created a gender division with the female staff members, which has faded over time. For a while the large numbers of men teachers disrupted the power dynamics in the building and created space for them to be complicit in a shifting culture that privileged their presence. Frank, Jerry, and George have benefitted from their White, heterosexual, married status and the hegemonic masculinity traditionally associated with it. Their male gender has created presentation opportunities, provided them access to resources, and positioned them as technology experts in the building. At the same time this status has forced them to be “role models” to young boys in the district and be labeled as disciplinarians in the classroom. At school working with other men, away from their wives at home, Frank, Jerry, and George continue to counteract the disciplinarian label by displaying a range of masculinities. This process has been aided by the birth of their own children at home, although finding time for nurturing moments continues to be a challenge because of the current state mandated high-stakes testing culture. The competitive salary, working conditions, and staff gender proportions have all contributed to them remaining in early childhood education despite attempts from previous

administrators to recruit them into leadership positions outside of the classroom. Moving forward, Frank, Jerry, and George intend to remain in the early childhood classroom teaching young children until they reach retirement age. Being men in early childhood education does not make them stand out in the Central City Elementary School, but planning on staying in the classroom does.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“The more that you read, the more you will know.

The more that you learn, the more places you’ll go.” (Seuss, 1978)

Introduction

This research began with the intention of focusing more attention on how veteran men negotiate identity and construct masculinities in early childhood education. Rather than concentrating on the men who were preparing to become teachers or the men who left the field entirely, this study focused on the men teachers intending to stay in early childhood education until retirement. It highlights a setting where men are no longer positioned as tokens, but find themselves within a critical mass of men teachers in early childhood education. This type of setting has been largely ignored in the literature and offered a unique look at the experiences of men teaching young children.

Synthesizing the six themes from the professional life histories of Frank, Jerry, and George resulted in four overarching conclusions: Social Structures (male power and privilege), Cultural Forces (attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors within the Central City Elementary Building and community), Constructing Masculinities (competition, caring and the fluidity of navigating gender stereotypes), and Negotiating Identity (role models,

relationships, and pedagogy). These conclusions address the central research question of how men negotiate identity in early childhood education and the supporting questions focused on turning points for remaining, masculinities, and school context. The conclusions were developed using the identity andIt is important to recognize all four conclusions were influenced by the critical mass of men in this case study setting. This chapter begins by addressing the four conclusions in relation to the literature and is followed by a discussion of recommendations and implications for future research and practice.

Social Structures: Reinforcing Male Power and Privilege

The first full-time teaching assignments for Frank, Jerry, and George, following undergraduate training, all occurred in the Central City School District. Surprisingly they have all been able to remain in early childhood education at the same building together for the past fourteen years with no foreseeable plans to leave. For the majority of their time at the Central City Elementary School Frank, Jerry, and George have not been positioned as token men in early childhood education; rather, they represent a critical mass of men in a small Midwest inner-ring public school. These unique gender proportions have influenced the structural forces within their early childhood school environment.

Frank, Jerry, and George arrived in early childhood through distinctive paths, but have been able to sustain themselves for many of the same reasons. Based on studies by Williams and Villemez (1993) and Simpson (2005) George's experiences reflect that of a "seeker" who actively pursued a female-dominated position, Frank shares characteristics of a "finder" who ended up at the early childhood level based on special circumstances, and Jerry a "settler" who tried masculine jobs (construction and landscaping) before

settling in a feminized position. During their time in early childhood education Frank, Jerry, and George have all experienced the “glass escalator effect” of being pressured to move up into administration or leadership positions by their male administrators (Williams, 1992). Despite arriving in early childhood education through different paths, Frank, Jerry, and George have all managed to avoid a path out of early childhood education.

Men who choose to teach young children can receive subtle, concerned, or abusive reactions from family and friends as well as questions about their motives from community stakeholders (Cooney & Bittner, 2001; Cushman, 2005b; DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; Mills, 2004; Mulholland & Hansen, 2003; Sargent, 2004). This has also been the case for Frank, Jerry, and George at different points during their professional experiences in early childhood education. George recalls getting mocked by his male roommates in college about his early childhood course work and assignments. When Jerry was teaching pre-kindergarten he remembers being asked about his sexual orientation. Today Frank continues to hear from his friends all the time that he is “gay by proxy” for being a male elementary music teacher. All three men have been able to ignore these negative reactions about their choice to teach young children because they have been insulated by an abundant group of male colleagues at the Central City Elementary Building. It is clear heteronormative beliefs continue to make not only the path to early childhood education challenging for men, but also separate the roles of men and women teachers in the classroom. The narratives of Frank, Jerry, and George reveal how early childhood education continues to be a gendered space where as men they do not fit in. However when they assert their gender and settle in as role models and experts on challenging behavior, they are offered a safe and acceptable place among young children.

While the lack of men in early childhood education can lead to them often feeling isolated or vulnerable (Allan, 1993; Parr et al., 2008), the critical mass of men at the Central City Elementary building led to their collective presence being labeled the “manclub.” These group differences impacted the social acts and processes within Central City Elementary Building. Rather than feeling isolated, Frank, Jerry, and George bonded to emphasize their distinctiveness from the women staff in the building, which was also the case for men in women dominated professions in Williams’ (1992) research. They bonded both inside of school during lunch and outside during summer “mancation” fishing trips. Due to their large numbers their gender placed them front and center and led teachers, administrators, and parents to collectively associate and stereotype them as the “male teachers” rather than as just early childhood education teachers.

Structural forces have contributed to the male privilege of Frank, Jerry, and George in the Central City Elementary Building. Both Jerry and George describe receiving initial hiring advantages because of their gender (Allan, 1993; Bradley, 1993; DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; Simpson, 2004). Some of the early childhood men teachers in the study by Burn and Pratt-Adams (2015) describe spending their lunchtime between the four walls of their classroom, while Frank, Jerry, and George were able to commandeer an old classroom, nicknamed the “mancave,” which offered a gender-segregated space to eat lunch with the other men teaching in the building. Despite avoiding pressure from male administrators to pursue leadership positions Frank, Jerry, and George all benefitted from close relationships with them (Williams, 1992). Lupton (2006) found token men in early childhood education often stand out and can be routed into more prestigious areas with greater rewards, which was also the case for Frank, Jerry, and George. They were given opportunities to present at local and national conferences, were nominated for

prestigious awards, and were selected to be a part of technology academy groups, which resulted in increased access to technological resources. An equal number of male restrooms were even allocated for the critical mass of men in the Central City Elementary Building.

As a result of the benefits from the structural forces at the Central City Elementary Building Frank, Jerry, and George have remained in early childhood education teaching young students. Similar to findings in Thornton et al. (2002) Frank, Jerry, and George all shared an enjoyment of working with young children, autonomy in their classroom, trust of administrators, and competitive salaries as reasons for remaining in early childhood education. In addition to the reasons found in the literature, this study illuminated two new explanations for the sustained commitment of Frank, Jerry, and George in early childhood education. They include opportunities to coach sports and lead after school programs and close relationships with male colleagues. A critical mass of men helped preserve Frank, Jerry, and George in early childhood education, but social structures also augmented the male privilege they received as well.

Cultural Forces

Today, men teachers in early childhood education often find themselves positioned as tokens (Sargent, 2004). During their last eight years in early childhood education at the Central City Elementary Building this was not the case for Frank, Jerry, and George. They have been part of a critical mass of men teachers at their early childhood building ranging between 25% and 40%. The women teachers in the building quickly accepted the unusual presence of men in a position often considered feminine, while the parents in the community were slower to acclimate to their arrival. The unique

gender staff proportions have influenced the culture within the Central City Elementary School building and the community.

Over time, as more men were hired to the Central City Elementary Building, parents in the community as well as students, administrators, and female teachers became accustomed to having men teaching at the early childhood level. Cushman (2006a) and Simpson (2004) found men teachers often receive acceptance from women within early childhood education and this was also the case with Jerry and George who were mentored and shielded by veteran female teachers when they first arrived in the classroom at the Central City Elementary Building. Time and staff gender proportions worked to change local views and beliefs about the role of men in early childhood education, which is consistent with Mulholland and Hansen (2003) who found contention and suspicions to be highest for new and pre-service token early childhood male teachers, which faded when they built up experience.

At one point, with more men recruited to the Central City Elementary Building in nearly every grade, kindergarten through fifth grade had at least one male teacher. This exposed students and parents to men teachers throughout their early childhood experiences in the Central City Elementary Building. Spreading the men teachers across nearly all of the grade levels unintentionally focused a spotlight on the difference in their gender between the women and men teachers. Over time parents began requesting to have their child placed in the men teachers' classrooms because they saw their gender as a benefit to their children. This led to a belief from parents in the community that men teachers made a positive academic difference in the lives of their young children. These local perceptions on the impact of matching teacher and student gender are only partially reflected in the literature. Driessen (2007) and Carrington et al. (2008) found teacher

gender did not significantly influence early childhood student achievement, attitudes, or academic achievement, while Dee (2007) found matching boys with men teachers and girls with women teachers to have statistically significant effects over time on student's test scores, student engagement, and even teacher perceptions of student performance. While Frank, Jerry, and George seemed to benefit more from the abundance of men teachers in the building than the students, this spotlight pushed Jerry to pursue a departmentalized math position in fifth grade outside of the early childhood grades.

Guidance counselors, intervention specialists, school psychologists, and even the female teachers supported these changing perceptions about what was best for young children in terms of teacher gender by consistently placing many active and rebellious students in the classrooms of Jerry and George every year. Jerry and George were silent about this practice and accepted the challenge they presented, but acknowledge the negative impact it was having on their classroom environment. This finding matches the literature, which suggests that when men have students with discipline concerns placed in their classroom it can impact the ethos of their class, lock them into disciplinarian roles, take away from nurturing moments, and make them feel resentment (Sargent, 2000; Sargent, 2004; Simpson, 2004). The arrangement of men at the Central City Elementary Building created powerful gender perceptions and placed Jerry and George in situations where they were viewed as academic authorities and strong with discipline. Changing perceptions about teacher gender raised the status of Jerry and George, while also working to diminish the abilities of the women teaching on their grade level teams.

One new finding from this study included how over time the critical mass of men impacted the intergroup relations between the male and female teachers at the Central City Elementary Building. The narratives of Frank, Jerry, and George reveal a gender

divide between the men and women teaching in their early childhood setting. Over time the women teachers in the building joked, resented, and even became jealous about the structural forces privileging the men teachers. Simpson (2004) found men in nontraditional occupations describe their work environments as relaxed and positive because working with women offered a nice break from competition and having to showcase masculinity. In contrast to Simpson's research, Frank and Jerry describe feeling a strong sense of competition among themselves and the other men, not the women, teaching in the Central City Elementary Building. As a token male teacher in previous professional stops Jerry remembers feeling he could rest a little bit and his gender offered him privileges not available to the women who made up the overwhelming majority of the staff. With a critical mass of men at the Central City Elementary Building, the gender of Frank, Jerry, and George did not stand out and placed them in a position where parents, teachers, and administrators had other men with whom to compare them. The large presence of men motivated Frank and Jerry to improve themselves professionally and led to them vying for the affection of their young students.

Frank, Jerry, and George continue to fit the culturally accepted blueprint the parents in the community look for in male early childhood teachers. They are White. They are heterosexual. They are middle-class. They enjoy sports. They are dads. These identifying characteristics placed them at the top of a social stratification system where they benefit from the power, influence, prestige, and privilege associated with their male gender. George believes the critical mass of men contributed to a "quiet power" in relating with both the Parent Teacher Organization leadership and male administrators. The critical mass of men in the Central City Elementary School offered privilege for Frank, George, and Jerry at the expense of social marginality for the women in the

building. However, with recent structural (equal distribution of technology) and administrative personnel changes as well as male teacher gender proportions slowly falling, much of this male influence has faded.

Frank, Jerry, and George and the critical mass of men at the Central City Elementary Building diminished suspicions, fears, and attitudes about men having a place in early childhood education. Their numbers and personal characteristics made it culturally acceptable to be working with young children and consequently offered them a heightened status in the community. This supports Cunningham and Watson's (2002) research which hypothesized that having a critical mass of men in early childhood education would lead to their acceptance. With time, because of the critical mass of men in the Central City Elementary Building, many dimensions of the building culture changed. These circumstances also contributed to a range of expectations about gender within and outside of their school environment.

Constructing Masculinities

Gender stereotypes have influenced both the perceptions of parents in the Central City School District and the masculinity construction of Frank, Jerry, and George. Positioning themselves as coaches and using competition in their classrooms further embedded ideas about the importance of men in early childhood education and the masculinities they should be demonstrating during their time with young children. However, they have also have been able to fluidly navigate gender stereotypes and carve out space for nurturing roles too. Their narratives offer stories of both reinforcing, but also disrupting gender stereotypes in early childhood education (Montecinos & Nielsen, 2004b).

In ethnographic research, Richardson (2012) found a boys club of men teachers in early childhood education fought against being like their female colleagues in the building by choosing to perform hypermasculinity, disassociating themselves from the sensitive, feminine men in the building they labeled “others” and considered “gay,” and distancing themselves from the feminized environment. To date his research has been the only study exclusively highlighting the experiences of a group of men working together in early childhood education. In the current study the stories from Frank, Jerry, and George describe a counter narrative to Richardson’s research. These three participants have been able to construct a range of masculinities due to being surrounded by a critical mass of other men. Teaching in a space surrounded by other men with diverse masculinities exposed Frank, Jerry, and George to both masculine and feminine roles. Frank credits his close relationships with men teachers as heavily influencing the way he has constructed his own masculinities and negotiated his identity as a “softer role model.” It is important to recognize Frank, Jerry, and George have been entirely surrounded by White, heterosexual, middle-class, married men in their building offering them little opportunity to distance themselves from “others” as was the case in Richardson (2012). While Frank, Jerry, and George were able to construct a range of masculinities, they unintentionally separated themselves from the women teaching in the building through their involvement in technology and through some differences in pedagogy.

Contrary to the literature (Decorse & Vogtle, 1997; Jones, 2003; Sargent, 2000) Frank, Jerry, and George have not been under the microscope with regards to physical contact with young children during their time at the Central City Elementary Building. While Frank and Jerry were both cautious upon their arrival, George credits open classrooms with no walls between his class and his two female teammates’ class as

easing any concerns he had about hugging young students. Jerry remembers all physical contact concerns with students were erased when the superintendent of the district gave teachers the green light to give students hugs every day. Frank, Jerry, and George all currently find themselves comfortable giving hugs to young students in early childhood education, but with the youngest, shortest students they still try to avoid student heads landing near their crotch. In her research, Cushman (2005c) found school ethos, age, marital status, length of community service, and personality of the teacher all contribute to the likelihood of male teachers engaging in physical contact. This is supported by the experiences of Frank, Jerry, and George who have taught together in a comfortable early childhood environment at the Central City Elementary Building for nearly a decade and half and are all married.

Another important influence on the construction of masculinities for Frank, Jerry, and George was having children of their own. Brody (2014) describes men in early childhood education as being discouraged from interacting in ways a father might at home, which was not the case in this study. Frank describes a change in his professional identity when his daughter and later his grandchildren were born. The reciprocal relationship between being a parent and early childhood teacher worked to improve his patience and supporting behaviors with his young students and helped him understand them better at school. As a result of having two children of his own George found himself raising expectations at school for his students with regards to time management and responsibility. When Jerry is interacting with students in early childhood education being a parent weighs on his mind and he finds himself being more compassionate and empathetic handling situations that might be embarrassing for his young students. Similarly, in Sumsion's (2000a) research, when men teachers become parents it can

become a social credential leading to the acceptance of more nurturing behaviors. Along with becoming a father, sustained time in the classroom and staff gender proportions are new findings in this research that have influenced both the masculinities and identity of Frank, Jerry, and George in early childhood education and also contributed to their acceptance in the Central City School District.

Lupton (2006) found men in female-concentrated occupations talked in detail about the challenges to masculinity, while Hjalmarsson and Lofdahl (2014) found men felt pressure to perform a certain kind of masculinity. Frank, Jerry, and George did not describe challenges to their masculinity within a critical mass of men in early childhood education. Frank, Jerry, and George did not attempt to distance themselves from the femininity associated with nurturing in early childhood education like the men in Roulston and Mills (2000). Similar to the men teachers in Rabelo's (2013) study Frank, Jerry, and George have been able to display affection, patience, and gentleness with young children. As in Jones (2007), the narratives of Frank, Jerry and George describe a lengthy, contradictory process of learning how to develop the nurturing skills they lacked upon their arrival to early childhood education. When Jerry arrived in early childhood education it was not natural for him to be a "coddler" because his wife handled these nurturing situations at home with his own children. His athletic background forced him to adjust how he handled moments when his young students were crying. Frank, Jerry, and George did not arrive with these nurturing traits, but prolonged experience with young children, having their own children at home, and being surrounded by other men with multiple masculinities allowed them to develop them in early childhood education.

Lunch and vacation conversations offered a gender-segregated space for Frank, Jerry, and George to discuss classroom experiences with young children. These honest

and open moments influenced how they interacted with the students in their classrooms, which is supported by Connell (2005) who found men create their masculinity through relationships with other men and in response to how other men view them. Teaching within a critical mass of men, who displayed a range of masculinities, exposed Frank, Jerry, and George to multiple ways to behave, form behaviors, and negotiate identity and masculinities in early childhood education (Allan, 1994). By demonstrating both feminine and masculine behaviors in early childhood education Frank, Jerry, and George continue to influence how teachers, administrators, and students understand the roles of men and women in the Central City School District.

Forming the “manclub,” carving out the “mancave” for lunch, and going on “mancation” fishing trips in the summer is ripe with hegemonic masculinity. The labels for their group, lunch space, and social events set the men apart in their social roles as well as their masculinities. King (1998) found men in early childhood education adopt culturally validated hegemonic forms of masculinity to assert their normalcy. This was also the case when Frank, Jerry, and George all linked themselves with either coaching high school athletics, after school clubs involved with competitions, or planning field day sporting activities. Similar to Sargent’s (2004) findings that men who care for children can be associated with subordinate masculinities, being an early childhood teacher linked Jerry with subordinate masculinities and limited his opportunities for coaching at the high school level.

When George was teaching in kindergarten he only provided building blocks and Legos in his classroom during center time, which distanced him from the feminine aspects of his role with young children. Rather than reinventing the house and dress up corner in his room like one male participant in Smedley’s (2007) study, George sent his

students interested in those centers over to his female teammates' classrooms during that time. Haase (2008) asserts that when male teachers separate themselves from the feminized aspects of teaching, unequal values continue to be attached to the work that men and women do. By associating themselves with these hegemonic labels and activities Frank, Jerry, George and the critical mass of men at the Central City Elementary Building unknowingly set themselves apart from the women teachers. It created a gender binary within their early childhood setting and influenced the perceptions of female teachers and community stakeholders. These moments also worked against their nurturing masculinities and further entrenched gender stereotypes with parents in the community.

Frank, Jerry, and George have benefitted from and yet also have been hindered by masculinities during their time in early childhood education. Their narratives describe situations where they have not only benefitted from hegemonic masculinities, but also experienced and become aware of subordinate, marginalized, and complicit masculinities teaching young children. Their extended time working together in a critical mass of men has at times reinforced gender stereotypes and also disrupted them as well. They continue to fluidly navigate a range of masculinities surrounded by other men because they all share a belief that there is no difference in what they can do compared to what a female can do in the classroom. This belief has aided Frank, Jerry, and George in developing nurturing qualities in early childhood education.

Negotiating Identity

The identity negotiation of Frank, Jerry, and George continues to be influenced by their school context (Gee, 2000), how they see themselves in relation to others in their building (Beijaard, 1995; Pullen & Simpson, 2009), and by personal, professional, and

situational factors (Day & Kingston, 2008). Day et al. (2007) found teacher identities change over time due to individual experiences and school contexts, which was also the case for all three men during their prolonged time in early childhood education surrounded by a critical mass of men teachers. Current educational policies and roles have influenced their professional identities, getting married and having children/grandchildren have impacted their personal identities, and the support and feedback from students and administrators in the Central City Elementary Building continue to affect the situational identities of Frank, Jerry, and George.

Foster and Newman (2005) found first teaching placements for men in early childhood education can result in “knock backs” from identity bruising. Frank, Jerry, and George arrived at their first teaching assignments, following teacher preparation in college, in the Central City School District. Jerry and George describe being protected by female mentors on their grade level teams, which eased their initial identity negotiation and helped them avoid questioning their feminine career choice (Cushman, 2012). Being surrounded by a large percentage of male teachers in their elementary building also helped them avoid role strain (Hayes, 1986) and remain in the profession (Deneen, 2011). Despite historically dated ideas and perceptions about the roles of men in early childhood education (Sumsion, 2000a), Frank, Jerry, and George have become comfortable teaching young children because of the support they have received from teachers, administrators, parents, and the abundance of men teaching in their building.

As discussed in Jones and Hodson (2011) and Sargent (2000), Frank, Jerry, and George have also experienced contradictions when negotiating their identity as teachers and their identity as men. One of these moments occurred when they were drafted to be male role models in before- and after-school programs for challenging boys and their

parents. George embraced being a male role model for his students because of his personal experiences growing up in a single parent household. Jerry and Frank both distanced themselves from the role model distinction and the stereotypes associated with it. In their minds the notion of a disciplinarian is linked with being a male role model, which they both do not see as a part of their identity in early childhood education. These philosophies correspond to studies completed by Burn and Pratt-Adams (2015), Francis (2008), and Skelton (2009), which found some men are comfortable with being gender role models, while others are not.

Also influential to the identity negotiation of Frank, Jerry, and George were educational policies. This finding is supported by Murray (2013) who found both internal and external factors influence identity negotiation. The high-stakes testing movement has not only influenced their professional identity, but also their masculinities as discussed previously. During his time in and out of grade levels in which state testing occurred Jerry describes a difference in his pedagogy. Jerry and his students both feel pressure in testing grades and as a result he continues to search for a challenging curriculum to prepare them to be successful. Outside of a testing grade he is more relaxed and finds time to experiment with creative instructional units. When George is in testing grades his professional identity negotiation involves attempting to find a balance between preparing his students to take state tests (what he needs to do) and project and game-based learning (what he wants to do). In music Frank is mostly shielded from the current testing and accountability policies, but does see how it has increased the stress level of both students and teachers. While he collaborates with teachers to incorporate some of their core academic skills in his music lessons, he designs his classroom lessons to offer a fun, carefree learning environment as a break from classroom pressure.

Nias (1989) and Sumsion (2002) found teacher identities are constructed through the interconnectedness of their personal and professional lives, which was also the case with Frank, Jerry, and George. Having children of their own influenced both their identity and masculinities as discussed earlier. Relationships with students continue to be at the core of Frank, Jerry, and George's personal and professional identity. Jerry strives to be the most challenging and favorite teacher of every one of his students. Frank works to be a fun and friendly teacher, while competing for the affection of his students with the other men in the building. George found it much easier to build relationships with students when he was looping and currently describes the importance of finding time amid test preparation to get to know individual students. Pressure from test preparation has made building relationships with students more challenging for Frank and George in the classroom and heavily influenced their identity and pedagogical decisions.

Over time staff gender proportions at the Central City Elementary Building contributed to the identity negotiation of Frank, Jerry, and George in early childhood education. Spending over a decade in an early childhood setting with an abundance of men able to display a range of masculinities has influenced their behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs working with young children. It has even led Frank and Jerry to move away from the male role model stereotype. Currently their professional identity is heavily influenced by state testing, which leaves less time for carving out nurturing moments with children in the classroom. It also limits the ability of Frank, Jerry, and George to dispel gender stereotypes about the masculinities of men in early childhood education. Having their own children at home influenced the way Frank, Jerry, and George viewed and interacted with young students at school. Teaching in a comfortable and supportive early childhood environment has allowed Frank, Jerry, and George to avoid many of the challenges men

face when negotiating identity in early childhood education and aided their ability to remain in place teaching young children.

Summary

During their time teaching in early childhood education at the Central City Elementary Building Frank, Jerry, and George have benefitted from and been limited by social structures and cultural forces. Both of these factors contributed to their masculinity construction and identity negotiation, which have been interconnected throughout their experiences in early childhood education. The stories from Frank, Jerry, and George reveal them to be teachers who enjoy sports and competition, challenge students academically in their classrooms, and are fluent with technology. They are also men who give hugs to young children, show empathy when their students are crying, and create calm and welcoming classroom environments where they build personal relationships with each student. Working within a critical mass of men in early childhood education did not hinder their identity negotiation and masculinity construction, but aided their resilience, self-confidence, and mindset, which Brody (2014) and Deneen (2011) also found in men teachers who remained in early childhood education. Their narratives reveal moments where they were complicit in drawing on the benefits of their gender, while also becoming aware of subordinate and marginalized masculinities teaching in early childhood education. They benefitted from the power associated with hegemonic masculinity through coaching and competition, yet have also been comfortable demonstrating nurturing behaviors linked with lesser masculinities. Being surrounded by other men created a hidden gendered competition within the Central City Elementary Building and contributed to Frank, Jerry, and George making the decision to remain in early childhood education teaching young children.

Implications for Research and Practice

This study began with an interest in the lack of men teaching in early childhood education. It was designed to explore the experiences of men teachers who were successful entering and remaining in early childhood education. By selecting an early childhood setting where men were no longer tokens, it looked directly at the goal in the literature over the last thirty years, which has emphasized recruiting a balance of men to early childhood education. Rather than focusing on pre-service and early experiences of men in early childhood education, this study used a three-dimensional narrative inquiry approach to better understand how veteran men teachers navigate gender roles, stereotypes, and masculinities. Results from these experiences offer a chance to better understand gender and power in the workplace as well as an opportunity to improve the retention of men in early childhood education and reframe the discussion for addressing their shortage.

Before attempting to design new educational policies to recruit a more diverse teaching staff in early childhood education, it is important to understand previous attempts. In the past two decades there has been an international movement concerned with the shortage of men in elementary school teaching and how to recruit more to the profession (Brody, 2014). There have been numerous policy initiatives focused on addressing the shortage of men teaching young children. One initiative in Scotland involved a short-term attempt to mandate men make up 75% of the intake into teacher preparation programs (Cushman, 2007). Sweden attempted to allow male teachers to “jump the queue” and establish a “soft” quota for their recruitment to teacher education programs (Cushman, 2007). Australia proposed providing men with cash incentives to follow a path in early childhood education and New Zealand even unsuccessfully

attempted to move the training of men to single-sex boy schools (Cushman, 2007). Scotland, New Zealand, and England have worked to increase salary for all teachers (Cushman, 2005b), which Johnson et al. (1999) suggest would entice more men to enter public education. Despite the positive favoritism men received during the hiring process and high-profile advertising campaigns directed at attracting more men to teaching, their numbers continue to remain low (Cushman, 2005b; Thornton, 1999). Notwithstanding all of these recruitment strategies and incremental policy attempts there has been almost no change to the gender make up of early childhood teaching staffs (Skelton, 2009).

There have also been cultural attempts to improve the experiences and retention of men in early childhood education. Sweden mandated all student teachers complete gender studies courses in an effort to provide all future teachers with the skills to challenge gender stereotyping in schools (Cushman, 2007). Erden (2009) found a semester-long course on gender equity in education positively influenced the attitudes of student teachers towards gender issues. The men teachers in Burn and Pratt-Adams (2015) study had varied experiences with gender equity training with some describing benefits and others feeling “attacked.” Thornton (1999) discovered an English University that attempted to stop the attrition trend by creating a Men’s Club support group during teacher training. These policy initiatives, focused on the culture of early childhood education, move away from simply recruiting male role models to early childhood education. They move towards finding and supporting the “right kind of men” (Mills et al., 2008) and the “best candidates”, which Cushman (2012) reserves for men prepared to work for social justice and those who show motivation for challenging and deconstructing gender issues and stereotypes.

The problem with the shortage of men teaching in early childhood education is almost universally agreed upon in the literature, but the framing of why it is a problem continues to offer considerable discourse. The boys struggling in school and the need for male role models quickly became a popular way to bring attention to the problem in the research and the media. The emphasis on the boys struggling in schools has influenced the direction of the research agenda and even primed audiences to gather support for solving the crisis boys are experiencing in their early educational experiences. Johnson (2011) argues the conversations centered on boys' underachievement and male role models are creating problems since they are confirming, not challenging sexist stereotypes regarding the roles of men with young children. Every time a male early childhood teacher is accused of sexual inappropriateness it further entrenches not only the suspicions society has about men working with young children, but also the call for heterosexual male role models. This cycle of issues has led to many failed structural attempts, and only a small number of cultural ones, at solving the problems with recruiting and retaining men teachers in early childhood education.

Recommendations

Johnson (2011) suggested focusing on the cultural conditions limiting male participation, how they prohibit teaching as a masculine practice, and how to adjust these conditions so that teaching becomes a more diversified profession. Addressing both the structural and cultural forces at work in early childhood education will not only improve the experiences of men teachers, but also restructure the power and privilege associated with gender. Based on the narratives of Frank, Jerry, and George here are recommendations to improve the experiences of men teachers in early childhood education, redefine how they are viewed, and aid in their future retention.

Removing “male” from role model. One of the big arguments for recruiting more men to teach in early childhood education is the need for boys to have male role models, especially for the children coming to school from single-parent homes (Cameron, 2001; Sargent, 2001; Sumsion, 2000b). Although George accepted this title, Frank and Jerry spurned the male role model designation because it was associated with being a disciplinarian and they did not see as part of their professional identity. This male role model belief continues to be split among men teachers in early childhood education, with the majority still feeling men are needed as role models in schools (Burn & Pratt-Adams, 2015; Carrington, 2002; Johnston et al., 1999). Martino (2008) argues this line of thinking leads to men teachers being considered better equipped at meeting the social and academic needs of boys, essentially diminishing the ability of women teachers. Bricheno and Thornton (2007) found students did not view male teachers as role models, but this label continues to influence the identities and masculinities of men teachers in early childhood. When teachers follow the career path of early childhood education they understand being a positive role model is part of the job. There is rarely a time when the term female role model is used in early childhood education. The problem with linking male with role model is the traits associated with being a male early childhood teacher (strong, firm, demanding) work in contradiction to their role nurturing and caring for young children. Both women and men teachers in early childhood education are role models and removing the term male before it is just the first step in addressing the hegemonic masculinities enhancing the value of men teachers in early childhood education.

Recruit more dads. Frank, Jerry, and George have been teaching within a critical mass of men at the Central City Elementary Building for well over a decade.

Being surrounded by other men influenced the range of masculinities they offered young girls and boys in early childhood education, while it has also reinforced and disrupted assumptions about gender roles, stereotypes and responsibilities. During this time the young children in their school district have experienced a teaching force that reflects gender in the greater society (Foster & Newman, 2005). This unique setting is a rare case because typically men teachers find themselves positioned as tokens in early childhood education (Sargent, 2001).

Uncovering the detailed experiences of how Frank, Jerry, and George negotiated their personal identity and masculinities following the birth of their own children, highlighted the importance of these critical moments. The literature has been focused on why more men teachers are needed and how to recruit more men to early childhood education (Farquhar, 1997). If we truly see the lack of men in early childhood education as a crisis, all the men who have made the choice to teach young children have untapped potential for getting men involved in the lives of young children. Rather than attempting to solve the daunting problem of recruiting more men teachers to early childhood education, simply using men teachers to recruit more dads to volunteer at school offers a way to get men involved in these young grades. Fathers consistently volunteering in early childhood grades would not only get them involved in the lives of their own children, but expose all girls and boys to men and various masculinities. An influx of dad helpers also provides token men teachers, who are often lonely and vulnerable in their early childhood environments (Allan, 1993; Parr et al., 2008), time to interact with fathers and their unique masculinities. Men create their masculinity through relationships with other men and in response to how other men view them (Connell, 2005). More men has the potential to influence how men teachers in early childhood periodically assess their own beliefs

and attitudes and look critically at the messages they are sending through their classroom environment and behaviors education (Uttley & Roberts, 2011). From the books read aloud in class to the learning centers that are arranged in their classrooms men teachers facilitate a space where young children develop ideas about gender. Including more men as parent volunteers during these early educational moments is a way to disrupt gender barriers and expose all teachers and students to multiple masculinities.

Opportunities for administrators. Looking at the history of public schools in the United States reveals cumulative historical, economic, and social processes involved with transforming early childhood education into a highly feminized profession (Drudy et al., 2005; Rury, 1989). Dating back to the early 1900s men who remained in place teaching young children began taking on masculine responsibilities and moving to male niches (Blount, 2000). The narratives of Frank, Jerry, and George show history is repeating itself. All three men began coaching sports or leading after school clubs to organize competitive events. Recently Jerry and George were moved from younger grades to departmentalized math positions in older grades. Although these moves typically lead to men moving up to more prestigious or administrative positions this was not the case for Frank, Jerry, and George. It is important for early childhood administrators to understand the implications involved with moving men teachers to positions considered masculine. Keeping men in early grades is an opportunity for administrators to remove the gender barriers embedded in the culture of early childhood education.

Some men teachers in early childhood education never become comfortable with physical contact because they describe being under a microscope (Decorse & Vogtle, 1997; Jones, 2003; Sargent, 2000). Prolonged experience in the classroom, school

context, and having children of their own can lead to men feeling confident modifying their physical contact policies in early childhood education (Sumsion, 2000a). The turning point for Jerry with regards to physical contact with his young students came when his superintendent encouraged giving students hugs every day at school. This removed any concerns he had about giving young students hugs. When men teachers are negotiating identity and constructing masculinities in early childhood education they could benefit from conversations with administrators about physical contact with students. Clearly understanding the possibilities for interacting with young students gives men an opportunity to develop their own strategies (hands off or hands on) and having this discussion might just be a way to unlock nurturing masculinities from men with reservations about it.

Jerry and George describe having challenging students consistently placed in their classrooms every year. Assigning students with behavior issues in men teachers' classrooms can negatively impact the climate of their class and take away from nurturing moments by locking them into a disciplinarian role (Sargent, 2000; Sargent, 2004). In addition to having challenging students placed in his room, Jerry became uncomfortable when his administrators accepted parent requests for student placement in his classroom. It put him in an uncomfortable position with both parents and his female teammates when students were switched the first week of school. Administrators have a responsibility to audit and evaluate school policies regarding unbiased placement of students into both male and female teachers' classrooms. Deciding to place students with discipline problems in male teachers' classrooms has the potential to lead them out of early childhood education and up to administration.

Cost of testing and accountability. Frank, Jerry, and George currently find themselves teaching in early childhood education at a time where the focus has shifted to student achievement or more specifically improving test scores. This high-stakes accountability movement has influenced the professional identity and masculinities of all three men. Both Jerry and George describe significant differences teaching in and out of grades with state tests. All three men are aware of the pressure it is causing teachers and students in early childhood education. These stresses have changed the pedagogical beliefs of Frank, Jerry, and George and in turn the experiences of the young students in their classrooms. This testing culture has even led Frank to view his music classroom as a place where students get a break from the demands they are experiencing as a result of preparing for achievement tests. The experiences of Frank, Jerry, and George show further policy evaluation and reform is clearly needed to understand and address the price these tests are exacting on the culture of early childhood education.

Finding critical mass. Reaching a critical mass of men teachers in early childhood education presents a challenge because of the shortage and availability of men applying for positions. The Central City Elementary School was able to recruit a critical mass due to its small size, low teacher turnover, and an administrative goal of placing men teachers at every grade in the building. The critical mass of men teachers influenced the culture of the school and the community as well as the decision of Frank, Jerry, and George to remain in the early childhood classroom. This study illuminates how the experiences of Frank, Jerry, and George in a critical mass of men teachers in early childhood education are considerably different than those of token men teachers. A critical mass offered them exposure to a range of masculinities and alternative paths to developing relationships with students at school. Feeling comfortable remaining in early

childhood education surrounded by other men teachers allowed all three men time to negotiate the contradictions associated with their gender. In addition to these personal benefits, the critical mass of men teachers challenged the traditional norms held by the men themselves, the women teachers in the school, and the parents in the community about who can be an early childhood teacher.

While we develop policies for schools to recruit a critical mass of men teachers, we need to better understand how a critical mass impacts gender roles and dynamics in the early childhood classroom. The narratives of Frank, Jerry, and George illuminate the benefits and complex issues resulting from the arrival of more men teachers to early childhood education. More fully understanding what men teachers experience as tokens and in critical mass situations offers an opportunity for improving teacher preparation programs and increasing the retention rates of men who choose a career working with young children.

Future Research

The intent of this narrative case study, focused on the experiences of three veteran men at the Central City Elementary Building, was not to generalize the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2013), but contribute to the conversations and to the research focused on gender roles, stereotypes, and perceptions in early childhood education. The strength of this qualitative study lies in the deep exploration and uncovering of stories from the professional life histories of Frank, Jerry, and George. It aids in the understanding of how men teachers in early childhood education negotiate identity and construct masculinities and remain in the classroom over time, while shedding light on moments where men are positioned within a critical mass of other men.

This study clearly indicates more attention needs to be paid in the research literature on how a critical mass of men in early childhood education settings influences power and culture in schools. Another specific area needing a closer look is how high-stake state testing policies are influencing the identity and masculinities of teachers in early childhood education. Recently attention in the literature has shifted from men training to be teachers to men with prolonged experience in the classroom (Brody, 2014). To better comprehend how to retain men teachers in early childhood education and eventually recruit a more staff gender balance this trend needs to continue.

Although the strength of this study is in the rich description that extends the literature, its narrow focus within the Central City Elementary Building and lack of diversity among participants leaves space for future studies. Moving forward, as suggested by Williams (2013), research needs to apply intersectionality to the experiences of men teachers of different races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, Bryan and Browder (2013) found an African American male kindergarten teacher experienced hyper-visibility as well as gender and racial microaggressions during his first two years in the classroom. Exploring diverse stories from men teachers offers the potential to better understand how to support their retention while they navigate gender norms and the heteronormative space of early childhood education. Lastly, to fully understand how recruiting more men impacts the gendered power dynamics in early childhood education more educational stakeholders (parents, administrators, women teachers) need to be included in the scope of future studies.

Epilogue

Recently a full-time technology position opened up in the Central City Elementary Building and both Frank and George applied for this position. George was

selected and has accepted this position and next year will move from third grade math to technology. Frank still remains in his music position. When this research began Jerry was just finishing his first year in fifth grade, which placed him out of the early childhood education grades after thirteen years. Next year he will again be in fifth grade making him just another male teacher moving up and out of the early childhood grades. While all three men had planned on remaining in early childhood settings, they have moved to technology and math positions often considered to be male roles. In addition, two men teachers from the early childhood grades at the Central City Elementary School have left to pursue administrative positions. These changes are quickly erasing the critical mass of men found at the Central City Elementary School.

Seven months ago my wife and I welcomed a beautiful baby girl to the world named Burkleigh Elizabeth Luginbill. After three months of paid family leave I returned to kindergarten and my class had transformed from students to the daughters and sons of parents. It is challenging to describe how having a daughter has impacted my classroom after only a few months; however I look forward to how it will influence my identity and masculinities over time in early childhood education.

In contrast, when Frank, Jerry, and George welcomed their own children to the world at home they all took less than two weeks paid family leave when more time was available. By making this decision they missed a chance to address the gender stereotypes limiting and privileging their experiences in early childhood education. Choosing to take full paid paternity leave, when it is available, can send a message that caring for children at home is a responsibility for both men and women. Early childhood administrators can facilitate this process by discussing the options with men teachers and communicating support for their decision to be at home with their family. This time allows men to not

only develop parenting skills and a sense of responsibility in the parenting process (Levs, 2015), but also presents an opportunity to make changing diapers and washing baby clothes more masculine. Men making the commitment to stay at home with their own children during family leave also erode the belief that it is important for only women to do it. Mundy (2013) shares that women benefit the most when men take paternity leave because it increases male participation in the household, enhances female participation in the workforce, and promotes gender equity in both domains. Ultimately, dads teaching in early childhood education have a powerful platform to send messages about gender roles to community stakeholders by taking family leave.

Co-creating narratives with Frank, Jerry, and George helped me unpack many of my own personal experiences in the classroom. My first ten years teaching in early childhood education I was a varsity soccer and baseball coach. It took a substantial amount of time for me to move away from the perceptions about my traditional roles in the classroom (coach, mentor, role model) and get to a point where I was considered an effective educator. A number of factors, including being surrounded by a group of men teachers, allowed me to settle in, become comfortable with the gender norms and stereotypes in early childhood education, and avoid a path to administration. Looking back, my coaching responsibilities eased my transition into this heteronormative space and contributed to my acceptance from parents. Unfortunately all men teachers, especially token men, are not afforded this opportunity upon their arrival in early childhood education.

For me, this research illuminates how schools are under construction in terms of unpacking the normativity that permeates the gender roles within. Schools are structured according to outdated cultural, gender, and sexuality understandings. Walking away from

this study I am committed to changing these understandings in early childhood education. Changing not only how people view men teachers in early childhood education, but also how men teachers view themselves. We must expect different from men, not more. One valuable piece of this research has been the opportunity for Frank, Jerry, George, and even me to critically reflect on our experiences over time in early childhood education. Four years ago, when I first started the program, it would have been challenging for me to complete this study as a participant, let alone a researcher. My time attending classes and exploring research aided me in becoming more socially and culturally aware. Reading the narratives of other men teachers in early childhood education has left me empathizing with them and understanding their situations. It has also made me critical of the social and cultural forces leading to the unequal gender power dynamics sometimes working against men teaching in early childhood education, but often tilted in their favor. The stories from Frank, Jerry, and George are just a small step towards broadening the notion of what masculine means for men teaching in early childhood education.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT FLYER



Cleveland State University

Dear Teacher,

My name is Matt Luginbill. Over the last thirteen years teaching kindergarten, first grade, and third grade I have begun to wonder why there are so few men teaching at the primary level. It is even more difficult to find male teachers who have remained in the classroom to work with young children. I am currently working on a research project focused on the experiences of veteran male teachers in early childhood education. This project is designed to explore stories and experiences from your sustained career at the primary level. These experiences will be interpreted through the lens of identity and masculinity. This study will involve four audio-recorded interviews, which will take place at your residence, in your classroom, at my residence, and in your male lunchroom at school. This study will not present any benefits or risks to you. If you decide to participate you can remove yourself from the study at any time. During this study, I can protect your confidentiality by keeping all interview recordings and transcripts in a secured location and by giving you a pseudonym, but cannot guarantee anonymity. Please fill out the bottom of this flyer and return it to my school mailbox in the attached self-adhesive envelope. Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me via email at matthew.luginbill@gmail.com.

How long have you been teaching? _____ **Which grades have you taught?**

Do you have any children of your own? _____

Would you be willing to participate in the study? _____

APPENDIX B

LIFE HISTORY INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How did you first become interested in teaching at the primary level?
2. How did you envision yourself as a teacher?
3. Tell me about your journey in becoming an early childhood teacher. (influences, education, and experiences)
4. Tell me about the places (contexts) where you have been a teacher and how you ended up at your current position?
5. How have you seen early childhood education change over your career?
6. Has there been a turning point for remaining in the elementary classroom?
7. What have you struggled with and what do you see as rewarding about teaching young children?
8. What do you do outside of work for fun? What is important to you away from school?
9. Tell me about your family. How would you describe your parenting philosophy?
What are your goals for your children?
10. What does the future hold for you in early childhood education?
11. For the next interview, can you bring three items that represent you as a teacher in early childhood education?

APPENDIX C
IDENTITY INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Can we begin with the three items you brought today?
2. Describe yourself as a teacher. Tell me about your role as a teacher.
3. When you think of your work as an elementary school teacher which experiences are most important to you?
4. What experiences have influenced your philosophy and how has your philosophy influenced your experiences?
5. Tell me any recent policies impacting your decisions in the classroom.
6. Who validates your work? When are you challenged?
7. What are your professional goals? How do you grow/improve as a teacher?
8. Talk about relationships with students. How do you build relationships?
9. How has the birth and development of your own children influenced you at school?
10. How do you handle physical contact with students? Do you have any concerns with contact? How do you manage behaviors?
11. What students left an impression on you?
12. What experiences with students have provided you insights into your teaching?
13. How would you describe the teacher you hope to be?
14. For the next interview can you bring some of your elementary building staff pictures?

APPENDIX D

MASCULINITIES INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Can we start with your staff pictures? Tell me about your elementary staff.
2. Talk about your school and district.
3. Do you feel supported in your current position? Who do you go to for support?
Who shares your educational philosophy?
4. How do administrators react to your gender? How do parents first react to your gender? How has time affected these reactions?
5. Does being a male make a difference in your contribution to your students?
6. What defining characteristics would you use to describe what it means to be a male in early childhood education?
7. Has your gender had any effect on your experiences working with children?
8. How were you able to negotiate the expectations and gender dynamics throughout your career?
9. What does the term “male role model” mean to you?
10. What are the reactions when you tell people about your work with young children?
11. What has helped you remain in early childhood education? How did you arrive at this decision?

APPENDIX E

GENDER PROPORTIONS INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What have you heard about men teaching in early childhood education?
2. What do you see as the benefits of having men teachers in early childhood education? Challenges?
3. How do the gender proportions of your teaching staff influence your experiences?
4. What do you think contributes to the substantial number of men in your building?
5. When did you first notice the gender diversity of your staff?
6. How does your gender influence your experiences at your elementary building?
Are there any benefits or challenges? Does it offer power or prestige?
7. Why do you think there so few men in early childhood education?
8. Are there any differences between being a token and working with other men in early childhood education?
9. Do we need to recruit more men to early childhood education?

APPENDIX F

FIGURE 2- RESEARCH QUESTIONS-INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview 4
Central Question	2, 5, 6, 7, 8	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11	4, 5, 6	
Subquestion 1	1, 3, 4, 5	10	9	
Subquestion 2	6, 9	3	11, 12	
Subquestion 3		5, 7, 8, 9	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	1, 2, 6, 8
Subquestion 4	4	12	1, 2, 3	3, 4, 5, 7

APPENDIX G

MEMBER CHECK PROTOCOL

1. Could you talk about any part of the text that does not accurately reflect what you spoke about when we met for the interviews?
2. Are there parts in this life history that you want to further develop/add material to/clarify/or change?
3. Is there any part of the text that you want deleted?
4. On reading this text what stands out for you in this life history?