

**MAKING THE TRANSITION FROM PARAEDUCATOR TO PROFESSIONAL  
EDUCATOR: FIVE MINORITY TEACHERS SHARE THEIR STORIES**

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(ABSTRACT)

Slightly more than two million teachers will be needed for the nation's classrooms within the next decade. Consequently, some states have begun to look to their ready supply of paraeducators, also known as teacher assistants, as a pipeline for supplying qualified teachers. These paraeducators who make the career change to teachers are more likely to remain in hard-to-supply geographic areas and to increase the diversity of the teaching force. This study explored the lived experiences of five minority women who successfully negotiated the transition process to become professional teachers. Phenomenological interviewing, within the hermeneutic phenomenology tradition, was the methodology used for data collection. To understand how these paraeducators attained their aspiration, testimonies of their experiences were developed from a series of extended interviews and presented as reconstructed narratives. The transcribed narratives identified common themes that were linked with research on personal and professional development of minority women seeking to make a career change. The discussion of these narratives revealed transitional paths shaped by pain tempered by perseverance and goal-setting. The five women working to achieve their goal, encased in a common time frame, began with an experience that propelled them on their journey. Four common elements emerged as beneficial in supporting attainment of their professional goals: (a) leadership support; (b) financial support; (c) family support; and (d) personal power.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Willie, who loved, supported, and watched over me throughout this labor of love; to my mother, Virginia, who encouraged me in her gentle, kind way; and to my deceased father, Ernest, for the many lessons he taught me.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM

#### Context of the Study

Slightly more than two million teachers will be needed for the nation's classrooms within the next decade. This need, precipitated by a growing student population and teacher retirement, has already created shortages in some specialty areas, in some demographic regions, and in teachers of color (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1998; Haselkom & Harris, 1998). As a result of this need, states have sought various means of supplying teachers, including recruiting paraeducators into teaching, for today's classrooms.

This shortage of teachers is exacerbated further by the critical shortage of minority teachers. Recent data show that the percentage of white teachers range from 87% (Dilworth, 1999) to 90% while African-American teachers comprise only 7% of public school teachers (Snyder, 1998). This composition is in contrast to the increasingly diverse student population. Snyder reports that of the 51 million public school elementary and secondary students in 1997, approximately 35% were minorities. The rate of growth indicated in his projection is that by the year 2000, approximately 40% of public school elementary and secondary students will be minorities.

According to the United States Department of Education (1996), North Carolina is projected to rank sixth in the 10 states with the largest student enrollment over the next 10 years. Through the year 2006, North Carolina will need to hire an average of 7,260 teachers per year resulting in a total of 72,599 new teachers. This number needed exceeds the current teaching force. The number of teachers needed still might exceed 72,599 because the department calculated projections based on a 6% turnover rate whereas the usual turnover rate hovers around 10% (Department of Public Instruction, 1996).

Based on survey data from each school district, the demand for qualified teachers reached an all time high for school year 1998-99. Approximately 6,000 new teachers would be needed for this school year. Areas of major shortage included math, science, special education, and Spanish. Further, analysis of teacher education program candidate data revealed that institutions of higher education would produce only approximately one-third of the number of teachers needed to fill the state's classrooms (Department of Public Instruction, 1998). The number of state-prepared teachers available for classrooms is lessened by factors such as more lucrative beginning salaries in other states.

The demand for qualified teachers in the northeastern part of the state has been critical for many years. School Year 1998-99 presented major shortages as stated above as well as in all areas of middle grades education (Department of Public Instruction,

1998). Because of ongoing shortages in the northeastern part of the state, school leaders and state officials have sought creative ways to fill the classrooms.

In an effort to meet this growing need for qualified teachers, many states have developed alternative teacher licensure programs to recruit new teachers. By 1996, 41 states had followed the lead New Jersey set in 1983 and adopted an alternative teacher licensure program (Sandham, 1997). Shen (1996), analyzing data from the 1993-94 Department of Education's Schools and Staffing Survey, reported that 13,602 teachers received their certification through traditional teacher preparation programs and 1,119 do so through alternative certification programs. These alternative routes allow public school districts to hire provisional teachers who do not possess traditional undergraduate degrees in education (Mangan, 1990). According to Mangan, the purpose of alternative teacher licensure programs is to expand and diversify the pool of teachers by providing incentives for mid-career professionals and minorities to become teachers.

Some states have begun to look to their ready supply of paraeducators, also called teacher assistants, to develop quality teachers. Rollefson (1993), analyzing National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data, looked for various sources or paths of supplying new teachers, including the pipeline of teacher assistants. Examination of occupational sources from within education shows that 62.9% of the new graduates, 61.5% of the delayed entrants, and 31.1% of the re-entrants came from the teacher assistant group.

Hasselkorn & Fideler (1996) suggested developing paraeducators as a viable way of expanding the pool of potential teachers from underrepresented groups because a large percentage of this population represents prospective teachers of color. Also, these paraeducators live in the community and are more likely to remain in hard-to-supply geographic areas when they become teachers (Genzuk, 1999; Haselkorn, 1996; Simpson, 1996). When paraeducators become teachers, principals report that they are high quality personnel who are easily acculturated into schools and who expect high performance from the children in their communities (Hasselkorn & Fideler, 1996). When these paraeducators attain the goal of becoming teachers and remain in their communities, they serve as role models for community children, family members, and others (Carter, 1977; Hentschke, 1995). The paraeducators' goal attainment encourages others to dream of higher goals.

Haselkorn & Fideler (1996) looked at paraeducator participation in teacher preparation over time. They posited that the potential pool of paraeducators interested in becoming teachers is probably greater than their participation in teacher education programs indicates. Genzuk (1995) finds that interest increased over time. Prior to their becoming paraeducators, 52% of the survey respondents expressed interest in teaching. However, after working five years as a paraeducator, 75% planned to become teachers. In its 1997 survey of educational support personnel, the National Education Association

(NEA) (2000c) found that 50% of the responding paraeducators were interested in training to become teachers.

In 1989, the Model Teacher Education Consortium (MTEC) was developed to capitalize upon this interest-participation discrepancy. MTEC, a consortium among local school districts, community colleges, four-year colleges/universities, and the department of public instruction, began for the purpose of recruiting school personnel from within the region and supporting them in preparing for transition to teaching positions. Its original focus (and one of its continuing foci) was to attract paraeducators into becoming teachers in one of the consortium school districts.

This model program sought to build upon paraeducator interest in becoming teachers by increasing paraeducator participation in teacher education programs. Paraeducators are located in preschool classrooms, almost all kindergarten through third grade classrooms, and in some remedial, special education, and vocational classes. Tapping into this large population could help to alleviate the severe teacher shortage in the rural, economically-deprived, significantly minority northeastern part of the state.

MTEC provided advocacy and financial support for participants. The consortium used a variety of strategies to attract participants. The first step was to hold informational sessions at school sites. At the school sites, all paraeducators and teachers attended the informational sessions to learn about financial support, courses offered, colleges/universities offering courses, and location of courses. At the informational session, some key aspects of the financial support were given. MTEC paid for books and all but \$40.00 of the tuition for participants seeking an undergraduate degree once they were admitted to the teacher education program. During the student teaching semester, participants receive a stipend for each month they do student teaching.

The second step is to hold advisement sessions where paraeducators meet with teacher education program representatives. These sessions are held at a community college which requires paraeducators to drive to the location that may be, at the longest, a one-hour drive. They must bring their transcripts to be reviewed for a projected course of study for becoming a teacher in their area of interest. Generally, less than two-thirds of the paraeducators at school sites attend these advisement sessions. The next step is course registration, which is held at the community college where the advisement took place. Far fewer paraeducators who came for advisement register for courses.

Paraeducators, who need to start at the beginning of the four-year degree, may take the necessary courses--the first two years--at the community college. Upon completion of the two-year degree, paraeducators may begin the process of being accepted into the college/university teacher education program. At this point, very few of the paraeducators who attended the advisement session at the community college initiate the acceptance process for the teacher education program. Paraeducators who get

accepted into the teacher education program tend to persist to program completion but they take longer to complete the program. The paraeducators have to be employed in the consortium school districts to take advantage of the financial support. Therefore, they take courses when they are not working, that is, weekends, evenings, and summers.

Upon teacher education program completion, the four-year college/university and the school district collaborate to facilitate the induction of beginning teachers into the teaching profession. Examination of the numbers of paraeducators who transition to teachers is not sufficient in determining why so few paraeducators engage in this career advancement opportunity. An alternative approach of examining the transition from the support position to the lead position in the public school classroom might lead to development of qualified teachers who are racially diverse and who have a commitment to teach in this region.

### Studying The Problem

Paraeducators who receive teacher preparation through alternative licensure programs serve as a viable source of teacher recruits for the public schools. As a conduit source provider, the consortium increased from 9 to 18 participating school districts during the 1997-98 school year. The number of paraeducators enrolled at the university who are participants in the consortium and who are pursuing teaching as a major increased substantially from 1997-1999. Yet, given the dire need for teachers, the large number of paraeducators in the region, and the ongoing support from the Model Teacher Education Consortium (MTEC), one wonders why so few paraeducators have taken advantage of this opportunity. The focus of this investigation will involve paraeducators who have been prepared through support from MTEC and have begun their first teaching assignment in one of the consortium school districts.

### The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of beginning minority teachers who have made the transition within the classroom from paraeducators to qualified teachers. The intent of the study is to give voice to those who have aspired and achieved so that other paraeducators can imagine a similar success. The following question lies at the heart of this inquiry: What did these paraeducators experience that helped them make the transition to become a professional teacher?

### Research Questions

Specifically, the study explores this question: What is the lived experience of paraeducators who make the transition to teacher?

Guiding questions. The following questions are intended to guide this inquiry:

1. How do beginning teachers who were previously paraeducators characterize their lived experiences in making this transition?
2. What are the underlying themes in this transition?
3. How do these themes provide an understanding of the transitional path from paraeducator to professional teacher?

### Overview of Methodology

Very few paraeducators persist from the MTEC informational sessions to the teacher education program admission process. Yet, this group of five minority women, who have been paraeducators for many years and were paraeducators throughout their teacher preparation coursework, persisted through the entire process to achieve the goal of becoming teachers. Having these women tell their stories of how they negotiated the paraeducator-to-teacher process could be instructive for other paraeducators with similar aspirations and for school and university personnel. A phenomenological study devoted to understanding their lived experiences was deemed appropriate for this question because very few studies exploring paraeducators' experiences exist. A phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). Phenomenology seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences (Van Manen, 1997, p. 9). This qualitative method of research is appropriate for describing the thoughts, feelings, and actions of these five minority women's experiences in their career transition from paraeducator to professional teacher.

### Definitions

For the purpose of this study, operational definitions follow:

1. Alternative licensure program: Any significant departure from the traditional undergraduate program for teacher education in the university
2. Consortium school districts: Any one of the districts that participates by memorandum of agreement (including the paying of the fee of one dollar per student in enrollment) in the consortial arrangement
3. Lived Transition Experiences: Events that occur during the life journey of the paraeducator to the beginning teacher that contribute to or hinder the participant's adjustment to the new role

4. Paraeducator: The National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services recommends the following:

Paraprofessional/Paraeducators are defined as employees: 1) whose specific positions are either instructional in nature or who deliver other direct or indirect services to children, youth, and/or their parents; and 2) who work under the supervision of teachers or other professional personnel who have the ultimate responsibility for a) the design and implementation of education and related service programs, and b) the assessment of the impact on student progress and other education outcomes (Pickett, 1994, p. 7).

5. Transition: Life experiences that occur from the time the paraeducator decided to become a teacher and then entered the teaching profession which cause participants to make adjustments.

### Significance of the Study

Many studies examine the career transition of persons who make the transition from a non-teaching, professional career to a professional teaching career, that is second career teachers (Crow, Levine, & Nager, 1990; Freidus & Krasnow, 1991; Madfes, 1991; Novak & Knowles, 1992; Serow, 1994). However, there is little data on beginning teachers who make the career change from paraeducators and the experiences they encounter as they negotiate the process in their transition to their new role as professional teachers. The results of this study will contribute to the body of research regarding new teacher development and recruitment. Data will provide personal development strategies which will be offered to guide other paraeducators interested in becoming teachers. Supports needed to facilitate the transition from paraeducator to teacher will be identified in order to assist school teams and leaders. Data gathered in this study will assist school districts and school leaders in determining strategies that might be employed in recruiting and retaining minority teachers, particularly in rural areas. Further, data from this study will contribute to the body of literature on women's career development from their own perspective.

### Organization of the Study

This study was organized into six chapters. Chapter one provided the context of the problem I studied the purpose, the research questions, definitions, and the significance of my question. Chapter two provided a review of literature of the conceptual frameworks undergirding my study. Major topics I reviewed included paraeducators, transitions, women making career changes, minority women making career changes, and phenomenology as a way of exploring the experiences of minority women making career changes. In chapter three, I provided the details of hermeneutic phenomenology for data development, management, and presentation. Chapters four and

five provided findings suited to answer questions guiding my study. In chapter four, I provided analysis and findings of what happened during the transition and in chapter five I provided analysis and findings of how the transition happened. Chapter six concluded my study with reflections and implications for the future.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Context of the Study

No age or event can of itself prevent the human spirit from outstretching its former boundaries (Sheehy, 1976).

I reviewed literature that encompasses five schools of thought to develop the conceptual framework for my study. First, I reviewed the literature on paraeducators to establish a basis for why they move up to teachers. Second, I reviewed the literature on transitions to enhance the basis of my study as it pertains to the experience of paraeducators. Third, my review of women explicated the relationship between life and transitions of career aspirations. Then, I reviewed minority women and minority women engaged in the paraeducator-to-teacher career transition to demonstrate the significance of roles for an individual in the transition process. Finally, I reviewed phenomenology to show how this method can be used to describe the lived experience of minority paraeducators who achieved their aspirations of becoming teachers.

#### Overview

On April 3, 1996, Jeanne Ponessa of Education Week proclaimed, Promise Seen in Patchwork of Para-to-Teacher Programs. She was heralding Recruiting New Teachers, Inc.'s third in a series of reports on the future of teaching in America, *Breaking the Class Ceiling-Paraeducator Pathways to Teaching* (Haselkorn & Fidler, 1996). That funding was provided to ascertain that there were varied programs scattered across the country--the patchwork--was significant. There were 149 programs nationwide enrolling more than 9,000 paraeducators. However, that significance pales in the realization that the patchwork has begun to provide the quality, diversity, and commitment of teachers needed in today's schools, especially for the most needy students. David Haselkorn, President of Recruiting New Teachers, Inc. said, We are talking about a better-prepared teaching force for the realities of many of our nation's most challenging schools (August 7, 1996). The nation's nearly 500,000 paraeducators working in K-12 classrooms embody a promising source of prospective teachers who represent and may be more rooted in the communities they serve (Genzok, 1999, p. 1). They tend to have a staying power that results in greater commitment and consistency in the instructional program and lower attrition in the profession (Hentschke, 1995).

There is a dire need to diversify the teaching force (Lewis, 1999; Otuya, 1999). In North Carolina, the need for teachers of color is so great that the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) concluded if current trends continue, the average minority child could conceivably have no minority teachers during the K-12 years



(April 1994). By 1999, minority teachers comprised only 15.9% of the elementary and secondary teaching force. Of the 78,627 teachers, 12,504 were minority (Statistical Profile, 1999).

Capital investment in these programs has long-term payoffs that transcend the arena of teacher preparation. The individual paraeducators have an impact on the children they will teach for many years and they provide enhanced contributions to their own families and communities (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996).

Effective teacher education schools employ extensive use of problem-based learning linked directly to P-12 students and they support teacher candidates in their continued professional development. These characteristics, found in the paraeducator-to-teacher programs, lead to lessened attrition from the profession (American Council on Education, 1999). David Imig, Executive Director of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), stressed the significance of this linking for quality teachers. The patchwork of programs for paraeducators to become teachers not only brings diversity; it brings a broad range of experience to traditional teacher preparation programs. This group is far more ready to reflect on what happens in classrooms. It is a different conversation that they are able to raise in the education school (Imig as cited in Ponessa, 1996). Further, teacher educators and policymakers endorse the concept of a career-long continuum for the health of the teaching profession (American Federation of Teachers, 2000; National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 1996). Paraeducator-to-teacher programs are prime examples of this continuum in action fostering stronger school/college collaboration, improved induction into teaching, and more graduated assumption of teaching roles as knowledge and skills are honed (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996, p. 4).

Paraeducator-to-teacher programs are important in improving the teaching profession; however, challenges for program participants prevail. Financial, social, academic, and external community barriers must be mediated to facilitate the paraeducator-to-teacher transition (Education Testing Service, 1995; Genzuck, Lavadenz, & Krashen, 1994).

In a very real sense, these programs break the class ceiling the defined roles of classroom authority that limit paraeducators' developing expertise and advancement; the invisible ceiling of opportunity that keeps far too many talented individuals in low-wage jobs; the subtle barriers to achievement which limit the potential (and contributions) of tens of thousands of Americans at a time when the nation can't afford to waste a single individual or not develop its people's skills to the utmost. (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996, p. 4)

### Paraeducators

Paraeducators serve as members of the school team to function in various roles to

support children's needs. Their roles have expanded over time due primarily to federal categorically-funded programs. In reviewing the functions of paraeducators, Pickett (1994) noted that the functions have changed dramatically since schools began using paraeducators decades ago during the postwar teacher shortage. Further, she noted that the demand for paraeducators did not subside with the lessening of the teacher shortage because three decades of federal legislation prompted the hiring of thousands of paraeducators.

### Historical Perspective

Historically, the paraeducator role began in the 1950s when policymakers facing a post-war shortage of teachers began to look for alternative methods for providing education services (Pickett, 1995). One of the first programs using paraeducators was the Bay City (Michigan) School District. Paraeducators were recruited and trained to perform routine clerical, monitoring, and housekeeping chores in order to allow teachers to spend more time on instructional tasks.

Then as now, one of the most critical needs confronting educators and policymakers nationwide is the chronic shortage of available professional personnel. This shortage is exacerbated by the recruitment and retention of teachers from ethnic, racial, and language minorities and in some demographic areas. Because paraeducators frequently represent high percentages of the racial, ethnic, and language minority groups living in their communities, they provide an excellent but untapped resource for meeting the need to recruit and retain professional personnel (Pickett, 1995).

To implement the education agenda of the War on Poverty, federal legislation in the 1960s and 1970s provided great impetus and support for the employment of paraeducators. Through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, paraeducators were recruited into Head Start and Title I Programs to work with educationally and economically disadvantaged students. Following these initiatives, the passage of PL 94-142 in 1975 brought about another major surge in paraprofessional employment in order to provide individualized services for students with disabilities. During this time, legislation requiring services for children of migrant workers provided another opportunity for employment of paraeducators. Then, under PL 100-297 the federal government mandated the hiring of bilingual paraeducators in proportion to the size of a district's bilingual student enrollment. Consequently, the numbers of paraeducators employed rose dramatically. Pickett's (1994) review showed that paraeducators were increasingly prevalent in the 1970s; the numbers declined during the 1980s; and then rose again during the 1990s.

In 1989, the Model Teacher Education Consortium (NCMTEC) was begun to address the quality-diversity teacher agenda. Seeking to alleviate the severe teacher shortage in the northeastern part of the state, its mission statement reads,

The Model Teacher Education Consortium is a collaborative effort which provides affordable, accessible, high-quality education/training to aspiring and practicing educators in participating school districts in northeastern North Carolina. This effort will increase the quantity of highly qualified educators in the region. The Consortium is committed to increasing the number of minority educators within the service area. (Murphy, 1997)

Financial barriers were considerable and geographic barriers negated a short drive from work to class. The barriers among public schools, community colleges, and colleges/universities seemed insurmountable for persons who wanted to stay in the area and work while obtaining a teaching degree from seeking that goal.

Until 1989-90, if you were a teacher assistant in this part of the state and you were trying to earn your bachelor's degree in order to become a teacher, you might start by taking some courses at a community college perhaps 30 or 45 minutes away from your home. When you were ready to transfer to a four-year college or university-if you could afford the tuition on your \$13,000 per year salary-you'd look for the college closest to home, and, even so, you'd very likely have to drive or carpool one to two hours just to get to the campus in time for a late afternoon or evening class (if what you needed was offered then). You would put in a full day of work at school, go to the campus for your class, worry the whole time about your kids, and make the long drive home along dark, deserted roads. (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996, p. 198)

To address the critical shortage of qualified teachers with diversity representative of the region, the Consortium sought to grow a pool of teachers from the area who would remain in the area. Ten local superintendents formed a partnership with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and public and private four-year colleges and universities. These colleges and universities had to be willing to hold classes for part-time students off campus at convenient sites such as local schools, central offices, and community colleges. Today, the Consortium not only serves the northeastern part of the state but has grown to serve almost all of the eastern part of the state.

### Definition and Roles

Many different names are used to identify paraprofessionals who work in educational settings. Education paraprofessionals work in concert with teachers and other professional practitioners to support and expand both programmatic and administrative services. In addition to federal categorical mandates, more school districts are providing after-school services for children whose parents need affordable childcare.

**Number of Public School Teacher Aides, Full- and Part-Time,  
by Five Top States (1990-91)**

State	# of Full-Time Teacher Aides	# of Part-Time Teacher Aides	Total
California	27,034	49,947	76,981
New York	27,743	3853	31,596
Texas	29,717	1,410	31,127
Florida	16,898	2,474	19,372
North Carolina	16,993	765	17,758

Both the numbers and the roles performed have increased. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) calculates the total number of full-time and part-time paraeducators working in public, private, and Indian schools at 455,541 (Bobbitt, 1994). Of the top five states employing paraeducators, North Carolina ranks 5<sup>th</sup> while California leads the nation in the number of paraeducators employed.

In pulling data from the 1994-98 US Current Population Survey, the National Education Association (2000a) reported that there are 800,243 paraprofessionals in the workforce. The estimated workforce of full-time paraprofessionals is 518,595 (NEA, 2000b).

Like the nation, recent data for North Carolina continue to show an increase in the number of paraeducators. The Statistical Profile (1999) reported a total of 25,638 full-time paraeducators (teacher assistants). Of this number, 8,501 were minority representing 31.16% of the population.

The NEA (1992) reported that 31% of all teachers received assistance from a paraeducator in 1991. Nearly 45% of elementary teachers, 21% of middle school teachers, and 15% of high school teachers have paraeducator services. More than 200,000 paraeducators work in special education programs while the others work in general and compensatory education programs (Pickett, 1994).

Most paraeducators historically have been and continue to be female but the ethnicity has changed. For many years school districts that hired paraeducators followed the Bay City (Michigan) model of the 1950s. These paraeducators were white, middle-class, and college-educated women confined to noninstructional, clerical duties with little prospect of career mobility. By the 1970s, as noted in the Career Opportunities Program (COP) evaluation, 75% of the participants were minorities. Blacks, at 54%, comprised the largest group of participants and the next largest group of minorities was Hispanics

who comprised 14% (Kaplan, 1977). During the mid-1990s, the Recruiting New Teachers (RNT) survey of paraeducators seeking career advancement through participating in teacher education programs found that 77% of the participants were minorities (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996).

From its inception in the 1989-90 school year through the mid-1990s, approximately 65 paraeducators had participated in the Model Teacher Education Consortium. Eighty-nine percent of the participants were females and 65% were from underrepresented minority groups (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996).

To define this group of paraprofessionals, the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services recommends the following:

Paraprofessional/Paraeducators are defined as employees: (1) whose specific positions are either instructional in nature or who deliver other direct or indirect services to children, youth, and/or their parents; and (2) who work under the supervision of teachers or other professional personnel who have the ultimate responsibility for a) the design and implementation of education and related service programs, and b) the assessment of the impact on student progress and other education outcomes. (Pickett, 1994, p. 7)

To differentiate among paraprofessionals, the National Resource Center suggests using paraeducators for skilled paraprofessionals who assist classroom teachers and other professional educators. Many times, the roles of paraprofessionals are defined by specific job titles.

For example, paraprofessionals employed in general, compensatory and special education may have titles that include bus/playground/lunchroom aide, teacher aide, teacher assistant, instructional assistant, and instructional paraprofessional. Paraprofessionals working in secondary education programs serving teenagers in vocational training and transition programs may have titles that include transition trainer or job coach. Paraprofessionals working in related services areas may have titles that include physical/occupational therapy assistant, speech/language/communication assistant, health aide, library assistant and more. (Pickett, 1994,

p. 6)

Many tasks performed by paraeducators in the instructional programs of early childhood, general, special and compensatory education show that the duties performed are more similar than different. Task analysis reveals that these paraeducators tutor individuals and small groups of students, observe students and gather data about their performance, and proctor and administer formal and informal evaluation instruments. Differences surface in specific program areas. For example, paraeducators employed in transition and vocational education programs for adolescents who have disabilities work

more independently than paraeducators assigned to Chapter 1, special education, or elementary classrooms (Pickett, 1994).

### Career Upgrading

Although the variety and difficulty of roles have increased, paraeducator training and development has not kept pace. The concepts of career lattice and career ladder for paraeducators have been around since the 1970s but very few states have standards or procedures for career upgrading. The US Department of Education reports that only 13 states have a paraeducator credentialing system in place (NEA, 1999). The career lattice provides for training for horizontal mobility, that is, providing increasing levels of responsibility in the support role. The career ladder refers to training needed for vertical mobility or advancement out of the paraeducator rank (Kaplan, 1977; Sweet, 1977).

Pickett (1994), calling paraeducators "the forgotten members of the team (p. 2)," has advocated consistently for paraeducator career development. She pointed out that roles and responsibilities have expanded but opportunities for paraeducator career advancement and continuing education have not kept pace. To alleviate this deficit, Pickett, Vasa, and Steckelberg (1993) advocated a continuum with defined roles for both lattices and ladders.

From one of the early-labeled roles as the teacher's secretary applied during the 1960s--to the wide variety of roles performed today, the status of paraeducators has changed little. In the teacher's secretary role, paraeducators are seen as cheap labor who perform menial and clerical tasks. Unfortunately, the functions remain primarily the same today and the salary continues to be very low. Many paraeducators still only perform clerical chores, monitor playground activity, and serve as lunchroom aides. Secretarial assistance remains the most common paraeducator assignment at all levels (NEA, 1992).

Serving in a supportive auxiliary function, paraeducator status is reflected in continuing low wages. Among all school personnel, only food services workers earn less than paraeducators. In 1997, the National Education Association reported national average salaries for full-time (30 hours a week or more) educational support personnel. Data showed that K-12 paraeducators (including both instructional and noninstructional) earned \$13,948, which is \$8,958 less than the average for all K-12 educational support personnel (\$22,906). The national average hourly wage for instructional assistants in 1996-97 was \$9.25, which represented a 2.3% salary increase over the previous year. For noninstructional assistants, the national average hourly wage was \$8.88, a 4.2% increase over the 1995-96 year (NEA, 1997).

At other times, particularly in federal initiatives, paraeducators function as a teacher-without-the-pay. For example, special education is one area where paraeducators are playing a much more critical role. In inclusive school environments, paraeducators regularly assist the variety of exceptional students in accomplishing individualized

education goals encouraged under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, often poses a challenge to underprepared regular education teachers. A similar challenge exists for regular teachers in school systems in which the bilingual student population is rapidly growing. In this role, bilingual paraeducators are often key because there are few language minority teachers or teachers trained in second language instruction to assist students (Haselkorn & Fidler, 1996).

As the variety of roles and responsibilities continued to expand through the 1980s, a new role, liaison between school and community, was identified. Some school districts and state departments of education began to develop training documents detailing paraeducators' responsibility for helping students succeed. Although detailed, these documents failed to address the dual need for effective utilization of paraeducators' skills and for achievement-oriented teamwork between paraeducators and teachers. To accomplish the goal of success for all students, agencies began to provide staff development for paraeducators while paraeducators themselves began to request training and education for their changing roles (Haselkorn & Fidler, 1996).

Pickett (1994) states that addressing these entrenched issues of status and low-esteem (indicated by tasks and salary) will require the nation to focus attention on determining appropriate roles for paraeducators in differentiated staffing arrangements, job placement, supervision and management, and opportunities for training. Approximately 30 years ago, the nation did focus attention on paraeducator preparation. Current efforts calling for better paraeducator training and development mirror a short-lived federal government-supported program in the 1960s. Many of the current patchwork programs have used lessons learned from the earlier federally-funded programs to build programs for success.

In 1967, the federal government began promoting teacher preparation for paraeducators in the Education Professions Development Act (EPDA). EPDA called for large-scale efforts to prepare paraeducators for licensure as teachers in the Career Opportunities Program (COP) (Davies, 1977; Kaplan, 1977). COP was evaluated in 1977. Some of COP's goals are to increase the numbers of underrepresented minority teachers, demonstrate that inadmissible students can succeed in higher education, better meet the needs of low-income children, encourage greater participation of parents and the community in schools, improve staffing in schools, and improve the responsiveness of teacher education programs in preparing teachers to work with poor and disadvantaged children (Carter, 1977; Davies, 1977).

Kaplan (1977) noted that the core of COP was its community-based, combination work-and-study program for nontraditional adult students. These paraeducators are indigenous community residents in low-income rural and urban school areas who possess maturity, experience, and empathy with minority children. Ninety-six percent of COP's participants are residents of the communities.

Kaplan (1977) reports that the funds being given directly to public schools caused traditional teacher preparation institutions to become responsive to the nontraditional student. Colleges and universities, which had a history of being slow in adjusting to change, responded to this new population's needs at their individual rates. Following are some of the accommodations Kaplan found at COP's 272 participating postsecondary institutions: (a) flexible admissions; transition programs for gradual adjustment to the academic demands of college; (b) taking courses to the work/school-site; (c) offering courses at off-hours convenient to COP trainees; (d) courses co-taught by university faculty and school personnel; (e) credit for supervised paraprofessional work in place of traditional student teaching requirements; (f) student teaching spread out over several months to integrate it with theory and practice; and (g) new, relevant courses added to the curriculum development. Also, other adjustments are made to meet the special needs of these adult students who were 10 and more years older than their student peers and who had a variety of life experiences.

The impact of COP's emphasis on paraeducator preparation is demonstrated in the 1974-75 program assessment of COP-trained first-year teachers teaching at 15 sites across the country. Kaplan (1977) found that COP-trained teachers outperformed a matched group of non-COP teachers in the same grades and schools on many measures. Further, despite a surplus of teachers in the 1970s, COP graduates are preferred for jobs over regular education majors by superintendents and principals because they are from the community and have received their clinical experiences in local schools. Although COP recruits seemingly less qualified applicants for teacher preparation, applicants had to prove that they were capable of handling the multifaceted variety of difficult situations in the classroom before becoming a professional teacher (Carter, 1977).

According to Pickett (1995), paraeducators are overlooked often by teacher education programs as a valuable resource for recruiting persons from language and racial minorities. When training is available, it is not part of a comprehensive system of career development that is student friendly. Inter-institutional and inter-agency coordinated systems must be developed in order to garner the resources of the paraeducator workforce to meet the needs of students. These systems must be designed to prepare paraeducators to take on more complex roles and duties. Further, to maximize the potential within these systems, they must encourage qualified, talented paraeducators to enter teacher education programs.

### Summary

To facilitate paraeducator career advancement one of the lessons learned from COP, Pickett, Vasa, and Steckelberg (1993) advocate a continuum which would include defined roles for differentiated staffing, standards for employment, and opportunities for training and career development. District-wide policies should be developed that define the roles and incentive of paraeducators training and development. Satisfactory progression could lead to earning academic credit for better preparation for lattice experiences. Ultimately, this growth and development continuum of paraeducator



training and experiences could culminate in opportunities to earn academic credit for entering professional teacher education programs.

### Transitions

Through the 1970s, adult development was usually viewed in three or four distinct stages categorized by ranges in age with a distinct crisis in each life stage (Erikson, 1963; Gould, 1972; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978). A predominant theme among these adult development theories is that adults exhibit predictable behavior patterns during certain age-related stages in their lives (Gould, 1972; Sheehy, 1976). Yet, given the dramatic changes in society and in the lives of adults, one can no longer assume that all adults will follow a linear path of development through life. Consequently, a reexamination of adult development theories and their assumptions seems to be in order.

### Changing Views of Adult Development

These models also require reexamination because they cover a narrowly-focused cultural perspective. They espouse a middle class, white, male, American perspective. For example, Levinson et al. s (1978) theory was developed from interviewing 40 white, middle-aged males in the northeastern United States in the late 1960s and 1970s. Eastmond (1991) questioned the application of Levinson s theory as a universal construct. The growing body of research in women s studies and cross-cultural adult development seemed to contraindicate a universal view of adult development. From his review, Eastmond suggests a model with phases related to adult social roles instead of the age periods posited by Levinson.

According to Aslanian and Brickell (1980), age is no longer a predictor of one of the adult social roles adult as student. They conducted a nationwide survey of more than 100,000 households in all 50 states to locate adults who had returned to undergraduate and graduate school when they were at or above age 25. They reported that most adult learning results from major transitions or changes in social/life roles such as marriage, childbirth, career/job, and retirement. Ninety percent of the adults surveyed responded that their single most important reason for returning to college dealt with entering, changing, or advancing in their careers. Because formal education is an intervention in an adult s life, it facilitates change, growth and development, and transformation.

Conclusions drawn from women s perspectives suggest that midlife transition often includes returning to school for career enhancing skills or career change (Eastmond, 1991, p. 8).

Numerous changes throughout one s personal and professional life seem to be inconsistent with rigid stage theories. Many family structures have changed as a result of divorce and remarriage. People change jobs many times during a lifetime; many of these

job changes necessitate moving to a new community. Changes within jobs brought about by technology and acquiring skills for leisure require many adults to be engaged in formal education throughout the life span. Adults must learn new skills to cope with these inevitable changes. In discussing new rules for old, Neugarten (1980) stated:

Chronological age is becoming a poorer and poorer predictor of the way people live. An adult's age no longer tells you anything about that person's economic or marital status, style, of life, or health. Somewhere after the first twenty years, age falls away as a predictor. . . . Lives are more fluid. There's no longer a particular year or even a particular decade in which one marries or enters the labor market or goes to school or has children. (Neugarten, p. 66)

Personal reactions psychological reactions--to these changes requiring transition vary. Regardless of whether the change is voluntary or involuntary, people experience a wide variety of emotions such as fear, anxiety, self-doubt, and a sense of loss (Kerka, 1991). Because one often sees personal identity as the job he/she performs, a reformulation of self-concept may be necessitated (Bridges, 1980; Kerka, 1991).

The age-related adult development theories have been criticized also because they may be inappropriate for women and minorities. Women may accomplish developmental tasks as do men but at different periods in the life cycle. Caffarella's (1992) review of both traditional and alternative models of female development suggested that women have different ways of knowing and growing. For women, identity is linked to relationships, connection with others, and intimacy rather than being a separate, self-defined individual. Women's definition of self (Peck, 1986) and self in relation to others (Josselson, 1987) have been inconsistent with the traditional stage theories. Barner (1981) studied community college women and summarized that seeming differences attributed to age may be a result of the historical time period during which the woman was socialized.

Hughes and Smith (1985) and Gooden (1989) reported that ethnic minorities career development is influenced by their differential experiences of home, school, and workplace. In exploring Black, professional women's development, Ruffin's (1989) findings supported some components of Levinson's model and refuted other components. Levinson's following four periods were supported: childhood and adolescence (0-17); early adulthood (17-40); middle adulthood (40-60); and late adulthood (60 until death). However, the sequence of stable periods with specific change events was not supported.

Jeffries (1985) studied 40 Black females ranging from ages 20 to 40 to determine unique characteristics and tasks associated with their development. She found that age was not significantly related to psychosocial development. A major difference was finding a phase in which Black females deal with a racial identity crisis while trying to

attain the American dream. In addition, she found that environmental circumstances impact development as much as or more than age.

### Multifaceted Adult Life Roles

Midlife crisis is one of the change events purported to signal a life cycle change. Although midlife crises do occur, adults experience cyclical periods of stability and transition throughout life. Adult behavior is not determined by age but by transitions. It is the transitions of continual need to belong, master, control, renew and take stock that motivates adults (Kerka, 1991; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988).

Hughes and Graham (1990) posit a multifaceted approach to adult development consisting of the dynamic interaction of various life roles one experiences during adulthood. In these varied life roles, adults can move in and out of roles depending on the experiences and events in their lives. Development occurs in the phases according to a complex interaction between the person, the environment, societal demands, and the triggering events that confront one in adulthood (Hughes & Graham, p. 4).

In this theory, most adults assume multiple life roles with the common ones being a relationship with self, a relationship with work, a relationship with others, and a relationship with family. A life role was defined as a general aspect of an adult's life that was viewed in conjunction with the other roles and includes the socially defined tasks and expectations for behavior (Hughes & Graham, 1990, p. 3). Self-concept and one's attitude toward others are reflected in the roles one assumes.

Movement through each life role occurs in a cycle consisting of four phases: initiation, adaptation, reassessment, and reconciliation. Initiation is the time of engagement in the life role, which includes the individualized learning and the assumption of the tasks and socially defined expectations for behaviors in the life role. During the adaptation phase the adult assimilates and adjusts to the expectations and requirements of the life role. In the third phase, reassessment, adults are involved in examination of the expectations and tasks of the life role. During this phase, adults seek to establish personal relevance and meaning to their involvement in the life role. The final phase, reconciliation, is a time of reflection on all aspects of the life role and a lessening of involvement with it. (Hughes & Graham, 1990, p. 3)

To test their hypothesis that adult development is variable across active life roles (roles in which adults are currently involved), Hughes & Graham (1990) administered the Adult Life Roles Instrument to 449 adult students enrolled in a large metropolitan community college system in the midwestern United States. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents were female, 70% working full-time, and 80% enrolled as part-time students. About three-fourths were over 23 years old and 7% were over the age of 45

years old. Sixteen percent of the subjects identified themselves as minorities with about 12% indicating they were African Americans. In examining gender, results showed no statistical variation among the life roles assessing relationships with friends ( $p=.257$ ), community ( $p=.739$ ), partner ( $p=.428$ ), self, or work ( $p=.601$ ). Gender difference emerged only in the life role assessing relationship with children ( $p=.0001$ ). Men were more likely to place themselves at the initial stage (for example, planning a family) whereas women are more than twice as likely to place themselves at the third phase, reassessment (for example, accepting their children as individuals).

Adults in this study report a significant amount of diversity in the different phases of their active life roles. Many respondents ( $n=432$ ) reported that they are involved in three or more different life roles with 2% reporting that they were in the same phase across all their life roles. Anywhere from 60-90% of the individuals reported that they were in almost as many phases as life roles.

Hughes & Graham's (1990) findings support the notion that there are common elements for age groupings but the elements are not universal. Furthermore, the findings suggest that adults address and solve events and dilemmas at different rates and times. Development occurs in the phases according to a complex interaction between the person, the environment, societal demands, and events. In this view, a person may be advanced or well-developed in one life role and an initiate in another life role.

### Life Transitions

Given both the consistency and variation in adult development and the suggested inappropriateness for some groups, what theoretical framework can I use to explain the adult development of women and minorities. It must be a framework that allows for the variations in the life roles and the different experiences of women and minorities which form their thoughts, actions, and feelings. Also, it must be a framework that allows for the explication of the inner and underlying process common to all transitions. Bridges (1980) personal development theory of transition allows for this explication. In this framework, transition is the psychological process people go through to come to terms with both the old and the new situation. Change is not the same as transition; it is situational. Change is external whereas transition is internal. Furthermore, the experience of being in transition is in itself a change process (Bridges, 1991).

As long as people live, they are in some form of transition (Bridges, 1980). The form of transition can be social, emotional, mental, or physical (Sheehy, 1995). Bridges asserts that transitions are a natural part of the life cycle punctuated by a penetrating break from the past (the ending), a transient in-between area (neutral zone), and the new beginning.

This theory of personal development views transition as the natural process of disorientation and reorientation that marks the turning points of the path of growth. Throughout nature, growth involves periodic accelerations and transformations. Things go slowly for a time and nothing seems to change and then rapid developments occur and become visible. The functions of transition times are the same for all living things. They are key times in the natural process of self-renewal (Bridges, 1980).

While this theory of personal development draws upon current research into adult development, it is a significant departure from traditional views of adult development based on stages dictated by chronological age. It suggests different ways of thinking and examines why and how transition occurs when it does. While recognizing that every lifetime has its own unique rhythm, this theory provides strategies for identifying one's personal developmental chronology. Regardless of specific forms of change, this theory identifies the underlying process of personal transition and explains its characteristic impact on work and on relationships. Finally, it provides concrete ways for people to help themselves deal constructively with times of transition in their lives (Bridges, 1980).

Job changes, marriage, divorce, and relocation are examples of some transitions that characterize a discontinuity with the past and an opportunity for growth and development which form the character of wisdom. Job changes are one of many examples of role changes requiring transitions. As a person shifts from one role to another, as in a career change, the identity or self-image of the individual is in transition (Bridges, 1980). Newman (1995) states that transition has almost become the new home because of the numerous changes in personal and professional lives. It seems to be a perpetual state where one moves from one place to another and it involves spending more time in an "in-between" stage. Because change is constant, people engage in transition much more frequently throughout the life cycle.

Whether transitions occur because of voluntary or involuntary reasons, people undergo distinct psychological processes that form a pattern throughout the life cycle. People undergo the transitions at varying times, in varying ways, and with varying responses. Responses (feelings) range from fear, anxiety, guilt, uncertainty, and even anger. On the other hand, sometimes people feel excitement and the anticipation of a new beginning. The way a person thinks, feels, and acts toward change is determined by one's history of positive or negative experiences with change and one's understanding of the normal patterns of transition (Bridges, 1980; Newman, 1995; Schlossberg, 1984).

One reason for anxiety and uncertainty is not knowing how long one will remain in a state of transition. Factors determining length are the severity of the change and experience in handling change. Another variable is that the phases often overlap, making it difficult to determine when a person has moved successfully through each phase and accomplished the tasks appropriate to each phase. A person should not shortchange the

transition process because going through transition can be a positive growth experience (Bridges, 1991; Newman, 1995).

Bridges (1980) provides a three-stage model for understanding transitions with proposed rituals and tasks appropriate for each phase. Phase one, endings, is a precondition of self-renewal and must be dealt with in order to handle what comes next. Phase two, neutral zone, is a time of inner reorientation when one needs to find ways to be alone in order to be away from familiar distractions. Phase three, new beginning, depends upon one's inner realignment rather than on external shift and represents a definite close to endings (Bridges, 1991).

During phase one, endings or letting go, one experiences the pain and loss of relinquishing what no longer exists (roles, job, life style). Regardless of whether the change was voluntary or involuntary, one passes through both denial of the reality of what is happening and one's resistance to the pain involved in letting go. According to Bridges, this is a time of endings; every transition must begin with an ending. A crystallizing thought for endings is, "Have I studied this change carefully and identified who (self, family, others, employers) is likely to lose what?" (Bridges, 1991).

One must act to disengage and disidentify with what has been in order to prepare for what is to come. Then one must experience disenchantment and disorientation. When one disengages, one separates from one's familiar place in the social order. In disidentification, the inner side of disengagement, one loses ways of self-definition, that is, lacks the familiar identifying label. In disenchantment, one's world no longer seems real.

Bridges (1980) points out that many transitions begin with disenchantment rather than disengagement. One is no longer satisfied with his/her job (it is no longer satisfying); therefore, one separates or disengages from the job. There is no rigid order for the paths one takes.

The last path in endings is disorientation in which temporal markers are gone. All customary signs of location are gone and one's sense of and plans for the future are gone. This is a time of confusion and emptiness when ordinary things have an unreal quality. One's sense of time is affected because of the ending of a familiar way of structuring time.

Bridges (1980) points out that each ending is dying with its own attendant rituals of death which need to be experienced before the new beginning can occur. Denial is a natural first stage in the grieving process, a way in which hurt people protect themselves from loss (Bridges, 1991, p. 24). Some other emotions of grief common during this ending phase include anger, anxiety, sadness, and depression (feelings of being down, flat, hopelessness and being tired all the time). How long one remains in the ending is

dependent upon the individual. However, too often, a person fails to allow himself/herself the time and rituals to grieve the loss of the old self or the old role in transition.

In the second phase of transition, the neutral zone appears on the surface to be an unproductive time-out when one feels disoriented and disconnected from both one's past and present. This empty space in the world/lifetime is an inner reorientation when a new sense of self grows. One must make or find a wilderness experience such as getting away by oneself without familiar distractions for a long weekend. The processes of phase two are the necessary and productive processes of exploration and reorientation to what will become one's new beginning. A crystallizing thought for the neutral zone follows: How do I structure and employ strategies to negotiate this chaos between the known (past) and the unknown (future)?

Bridges (1980) describes the neutral zone, which is usually the longest and most ambiguous phase, as a rich time for solitude, contemplation, and self-discovery, as well as for the obvious exploration of the new possibilities open to the person. Given the seeming formlessness of the exploration of both self and possibilities, people tend to feel frightened, confused, disorganized, and resentful. Instead of using their energy for work (paid and unpaid), they are using their energy for coping. Yet, people need to recognize that it is natural to feel somewhat frightened and confused in this no-man's-land (Bridges, 1991, p. 37).

Because one is in such a nebulous state, retreat is the appropriate ritual of the neutral zone. However, instead of retreating, one should use the neutral zone as an opportunity to take stock of oneself and to reassess goals and values. This nebulous state or chaos—not a mess, rather a primal state of pure energy (Bridges, 1980, p. 119) can be a time that is ripe with creative opportunity. Neutral zone creativity is the key to turning transition from a time of breakdown to a time of breakthrough (Bridges, 1991, p. 46). Bridges asserts that the contemplation or reflection and self-discovery one applies in exploration of the new possibilities in the numerous neutral zone experiences throughout one's lifetime leads to the development of wisdom.

Because one has undergone the chaos and uncertainty of the previous two phases, the person comes to phase three, the new beginning. This phase involves an inner alignment, not an external alignment, that is signaled by a renewal of energy which is the mark of rebirth into a new direction or a new way of life. A crystallizing thought for the new beginning follows: Have I developed and employed strategies to symbolize my new identity including the roles others (family, friends/community, employers) will play?

Bridges (1980) said that everyone has trouble with new beginnings because of the anxieties and confusion that result from fear that real change destroys the old ways in which one previously established his/her security. Ambivalence prevails because people

both want and fear the new beginning. People tend to feel that there is the possibility that the individual in question won't be good enough at it to succeed, or even that he or she will make a shameful mess of the effort (Bridges, 1991, p. 51).

Yet, out of all the pain and confusion of the phases, new life grows and develops. Bridges (1980) noted that the new life may be a gradual beginning rather than a sudden realization but one day the person realizes that he/she has stopped getting ready and has begun to identify with the final result of the new beginning. The final result may be something that has resided deep in one's wanting; something the person wanted a long time ago but failed to make it happen. The person begins to describe himself/herself in terms of this new identity. One's guide through the change is a vision of the future, beyond this particular period of transition.

This transition process of personal development involves a willingness to go through the pain and vulnerability of uncertainty in order to regain a sense of personal power over the conditions and outcomes of one's life. Transition is such a stressful process, one must work to maintain one's physical health and to identify and experience some continuity in one's environment (Bridges, 1991; Newman, 1995).

#### Paraeducator to Professional Teacher

Paraeducators preparing to become teachers are engaging in the social role of adult student. Paraeducator age reported by Haselkorn & Fideler (1996) ranged from 18-55 with over two-thirds of the programs reporting ages between 31 and 40 years. Most of the time, these adult students are attending classes with the traditional-age student who has just finished high school. Thus, paraeducators as students, already faced with many life roles, are adding an additional role necessitating many new skills.

Paraeducators engaging in negotiating the higher education process to become teachers encounter hurdles unrelated to their academic performance. Many of the programmatic hurdles of the 1970s COP are the same ones reported in the 1990s Class Ceiling. Financial, social, academic, and external community barriers must be alleviated because the preparation of this group of persons allows for a closer connection of theory with practice in P-12 education, teachers attuned with the school culture, teachers ready to reflect on change and change processes for their own growth and development, teachers committed to their communities, and lessened attrition from the profession.

#### Context of the Profession

The teaching profession is in jeopardy because a large number of career teachers is retiring and new teachers are not staying. At the beginning of the career, during preservice preparation, the following three areas typically are addressed inadequately: the complexity of school culture, the nurturing of reflective practice, and the taken-for-



granted assumptions of preservice teachers (Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, & Enz, 2000, p. 32). To remedy this inadequacy, organizations and individuals have called for a career-long continuum for the development of teachers. In this continuum, The characteristics nurtured in future teachers must go beyond teaching techniques to frames of mind or dispositions that will serve them well throughout their career (Steffy et al., p. 40). Use of a life cycle model spans the continuum. Therefore, I will discuss paraeducator preparation and continued development through a continuum perspective.

To develop the competent, caring, qualified teacher specified by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), Steffy et al. (2000) state that teachers need to view their work as culturally situated and to feel empowered as change agents and decision makers (Steffy et al., p. 31). To become these reflective change agents and to facilitate the transition from school to work, prospective teachers must develop a repertoire of skills while being a part of the school environment.

Schools are complex cultures for new teachers to master. There is such disconnect between theory and practice in P-12 education that many newly-hired teachers feel their college preparation did not prepare them for the real world of the classroom. One major impact of this disconnect is attrition from teaching. Nationally, about 30% of all newly hired teachers leave the profession within the first few years (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF], 1996). In North Carolina, 16-20% of new teachers on average leave after the first year and 40-50% of all new teachers abandon the classroom by the end of the fifth year (Public School Forum, 1996, p. 8).

That there is a disconnect of the cultural context lies with both the colleges/universities and the schools. Traditionally, the preparation of teachers has occurred in two distinct, separate environments the college for propositional knowledge and the school/classroom for limited practice at the end of the college experience. Completion of student teaching and subsequent graduation was the end of affiliation with the college and the college had no formal responsibility for induction. The induction period, beginning to work as a teacher, was seen solely as the responsibility of the employing agency. This organizational arrangement failed to provide an ongoing setting with opportunities for examining assumptions and critical thinking about behaviors.

### Life Cycle of a Teacher

To engender the knowledge, skills and dispositions of the competent, caring, and qualified teacher for today's multicultural schools, Steffy et al. (2000) have proposed a developmental model of progressive phases with a reflection-renewal-growth process. This process captures the vision of teaching which when operationalized facilitates teachers reaching the NCTAF standard of excellence within the first five years of teaching. The model is based on an ongoing process that takes place throughout a life cycle in this instance, the life cycle of a teaching career (Steffy et al., p. 2). Steffy et al.

posit that growth results from the individual interacting with his/her environment and this growth is impelled by actively making choices. In this ongoing developmental process, characteristics such as independent decision making and reflective thinking are key to professional growth and success.

The six phases of this model offer a continuum that is useful in promoting teacher efficacy. The phases of novice, apprentice, professional, expert, distinguished, and emeritus are content and task specific and exist along the continuum of excellent teaching across the career (Steffy et al., 2000, p. 5). For my study, I discuss the first three phases in detail and highlight the last three phases.

The Novice Phase. To bridge the chasm between knowledge and practice, this model fully incorporates the college preparation into the continuum as the first phase. The first phase, novice, begins when preservice students begin their first practicum or field-based experience in the teacher education program. This phase ends with the student teaching or internship experience. Depending upon the university, this phase may begin in the freshman year or as late as the junior year. This integration into the world of practice is executed throughout preparation in liberal arts, specific subject matter, and a professional and pedagogical sequence of courses.

At this point when novice teachers are beginning to acquire the skills necessary to function effectively in the classroom, they are hesitant and unsure about their becoming able to direct and engage all students in the learning activities. Field-based observation in real classrooms provides them with opportunities to see how professional teachers create and manage the learning environment.

During this phase, the novice experiences a range of emotions regarding this orientation to and subsequent induction into the teaching profession. Novice teachers may be confused and even overwhelmed by the clash of their expectations for teaching and the reality of the classroom and school. They often are so consumed with looking like teachers that they miss understanding the complexities of student behavior (Steffy et al., 2000, p. 30). This idealism is accompanied by anxiety, frustration, disillusionment, elation, fear, and insecurity. The traditional novice needs a great deal of mentoring because he/she remains naive regarding many of the organizational, administrative, and interpersonal forces that impact teachers. However, confidence grows as he/she succeeds with students and learns more about themselves and classroom practices.

In relationship to the novice phase, Haselkorn & Fideler (1996) reported that paraeducator-to-teacher programs are becoming important proving grounds for a new paradigm of teacher development (p. 57). The 1990s Class Ceiling respondents looked back to the 1970s COP for proven processes to engender success for participants. Some of the college/university changes put in place for paraeducators follow: (a) offering courses close to their work sites; (b) unconventional scheduling (combining the 3-

day/week class into a single time block); (c) more on-site experience; (d) increased emphasis on individualization; and (e) changes in student teaching. In North Carolina, some specific changes included a culminating full-year internship, new courses, reorganization of course sequences, and credit for classroom work (Carter, 1977). In the 1990s, the Model Teacher Education Consortium reported favoring the nontraditional approach of having the colleges/universities take their courses to convenient off-campus locations, usually a community college campus.

Steffy et al. (2000) summarized that whether paraeducator or traditional teacher candidate novices share two experiences in preparing to become a teacher. They have exposure to preparatory coursework through a school of education and they have supervised field experiences. In the preparatory coursework, paraeducators who have been out of school for many years prior to returning for teacher preparation meet the GPA requirements for admission and perform as well as traditional students (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996). Carter (1977) reported the findings of the New Careers Training Laboratory program evaluation from a multidimensional assessment of a matched sample of first-year COP-prepared and non-COP teachers at 15 sites across the country. Using grades as the measure, the COP participants performed as well as the non-COPs. COP participants did express greater satisfaction with their college preparation. Paraeducators who meet the GPA entrance requirement tend to stay in college. The average drop-out rate for paraeducator-to-teacher program participants is exceptionally low at a mere 11% (the median is an even lower 7%) despite the long haul to licensure. (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996, p. 35).

Haselkorn & Fideler (1996) found a wide variety of value-added supports in addition to the financial support provided by the paraeducator-to-teacher programs. They posited that one explanation for the enviable college retention rate is the wide range of both formal and informal support services. Some of the supports provided include academic advising, tutoring, personal counseling, test preparation, and child care services. These support services are seen as critical components of program success.

Even if a preservice teacher takes on numerous early field experiences, the length and immersion of the student teaching or internship almost always exposes a tension between classroom reality and the relevance of the teacher education program (Steffy et al., p. 31). However, with paraeducators' wealth of classroom experience, they are less susceptible to the classroom shock that is well documented among beginning teachers. The paraeducators' work can be viewed as an extended form of clinical experience (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996).

The Apprentice Phase. The second phase, apprentice, begins the induction period and extends into the second or third year of teaching. It is the beginning of the professional period when the teacher is contracted for employment. The new teacher has full responsibility for the management of learning and behavior for all the students. This

phase is marked by the integration and synthesis of knowledge, pedagogy, and the emergence of confidence about being a teacher. The shift from novice to apprentice is perhaps the most complex intellectual and emotional transition on the continuum of teacher development (Steffy et al., p. 48).

Teachers at this career phase are filled with a variety of feelings as they grow and develop confidence in their ability to assure that all children will achieve at high levels. Although filled with self-doubt, many love teaching and believe they have the skills and ability necessary to motivate all children and to enlist parental support in this learning. Apprentices are open to new ideas, energetic, and volunteer to serve on committees and work on extracurricular activities. They tend to underestimate the amount of time required to complete all work associated with teacher responsibility. As new teachers, they are too often given multiple class preparations or assigned the students who pose the greatest behavior or academic challenges. They want to be accepted by their peers, to develop workplace friendships, and to feel competent in their job.

Unfortunately, many apprentices are unwilling to share their concerns about the challenges presented by the students' behavior and academics, the curriculum, and daily administrative management because their colleagues will view them as incapable of handling the demands of teaching. So, they isolate themselves, become defensive, more stressful, and less competent. The myriad experiences in this phase lead to a roller coaster of contradictory emotions—simultaneously feeling excited, overwhelmed, discouraged, and rewarded (Steffy et al., p. 49). Overwhelmed with the demands of the profession, these enthusiastic apprentice teachers may become disillusioned and leave the profession. However, if the apprentice can avoid becoming disillusioned and continue to reflect critically on their experiences, renewal and growth can lead them to the next phase in their careers.

Again, the COP program evaluation from a multidimensional assessment of a matched sample of first-year COP-prepared and non-COP teachers provided data for this phase.

Covering personal characteristics, attitudes, classroom behavior, and impact on pupils, the data fell into a consistent pattern. The Career Opportunities Program-trained teachers were more likely to have a more positive attitude toward teaching, be more socially oriented, have more vigor, be more original in thought, and receive a higher rating from the principal based on their work in the classroom. They were more supportive of student-initiated talk and less likely to ask questions soliciting rote responses. The children taught by the COP-trained teacher had a more positive self-concept, had parents with more positive attitudes toward school, and performed better on standardized achievement tests. Although many of the differences between the COP-trained and non-COP-trained teachers are small, the pattern of differences is clear and consistent. (Kaplan, 1977, p. 123)

A year two follow-up retained the evaluative processes used in the year one follow-up and it was expanded to include a new instrument to examine a broader view of school/teacher/pupil data.

A follow-up study at the same 15 sites along Axis I (the person) revealed that COP-trained second year teachers were more aware than their peers of the "ethos" of the schools. Although the non-COP group was learning much about the quality and pace of school life, the COP teachers were appreciably ahead, and the gap was widening. There were also continuing pro-COP differences on pupil orientation. The COP teachers tended to be more accepting of individual differences among pupils and felt a greater sense of responsibility and accountability for the pupil's progress. The non-COP trained group tended in general to ascribe success or failure to the attitude of the pupil and failure of disciplinary action. (Carter, 1977, pp. 209-210)

The year two data revealed that non-COP teachers were readier to shift schools whereas the COP group remained committed to their communities. COP teachers retained their enthusiasm for teaching and were more inclined to stay in the classroom rather than move on to allied pursuits.

The second-year COP teacher, while primarily concerned with the teaching function, tended to view the school as a system and to be interested in such matters as organization, morale, teacher competence, and committee membership. By the second year, her or his non-COP peers were more concerned with such day-to-day matters as class size, modes of supervision and rules and procedures. (Carter, 1977, p. 210)

The second-year COP teacher showed competence in obtaining the cooperation of pupils and in using consistency in disciplinary approaches. The study revealed that the COP and non-COP teachers had different attitudes toward children and their behavior.

The non-COP teacher, as a rule, tended to be understanding; the COP group, on the whole, was demanding. Finally, the COP teacher shows stronger signs of believing that, once absorbed into the local school, (s)he will be able to exert a constructive effect for needed change there (Carter, 1977, p. 211).

The Professional Phase. The professional phase emerges as teachers grow in their self-confidence and this increased self-confidence is the most noticeable difference between apprentice and professional teachers. Thus, the benchmark of a professional teacher is the shift from personal needs to the needs of the students. Student orientation is central to the professional phase (Steffy et al., 2000, p. 63). This shift in moving from an instructional paradigm to a learner paradigm is a distinctive mark of a maturing, caring, and competent teacher (Steffy et al., p. 65). Students view professional teachers

as patient, kind, understanding, and helpful. In turn, these teachers view themselves as student advocates.

Professional teachers, comprising the largest portion of most school faculties, are the backbone of the profession. Whereas, apprentice teachers work to develop a broader repertoire of instructional and management approaches, professional teachers focus on the effectiveness of these approaches with their own students. Professional teachers devote great time and energy to modifying these approaches to fit their students' individual learning needs.

The professional phase is uniquely characterized by continuous growth seeking. When a teacher's level of confidence increases, he or she has more emotional and mental energy, which in turn means listening to students better (Steffy et al., 2000, p. 63). Administrators tend to overlook the needs of professional teachers because professional teachers look to their students to provide them with motivation.

Teachers in the professional phase are active in defining their own needs and creating their individual growth plans. With increased confidence, professional teachers seek assistance from their colleagues and become resources to others. They actively participate in a collegial network for support in their continued development. Professional teachers recognize the importance of reflective practice and find ways to engage it fully into their daily routines. They readily acknowledge when something is not quite right in their own practice because engaging in reflection is valued for its own intrinsic rewards. It is at this phase that teachers have satisfied the requirements for state licensing.

The Expert Phase. The expert phase symbolizes achievement of the high standards desired by NCTAF regardless of whether or not they seek national certification. This model is based on the premise that all teachers can reach this standard of excellence within the first five years.

Expert teachers anticipate student responses, modifying and adjusting instruction to promote growth. Teachers at this level competently support, facilitate, and nurture growth and development of all students by being proactive and anticipating the needs of diverse learners. They create learning communities to empower all students to reach their potential.

Expert teachers usually internalize reflection in facilitating their growth and change. They are committed to the newest and best ideas in the profession. They are self-motivated to improve their teaching because of their strong commitment to the profession. They use the expertise they have gained to assist others and serve as leaders. They tend to hold leadership roles in professional organizations.

Distinguished and Emeritus Phases. The distinguished phase is reserved for truly gifted teachers who exceed current expectations for what teachers are expected to know and do. Students, parents, administrators, and the community revere distinguished teachers. They tend to impact children's lives beyond the walls of the school. Distinguished teachers are often the driving force behind change in schools. Their passion and leadership lead them to impact education-related decisions not only at school but also at city, state, and national levels.

The emeritus phase marks a lifetime of achievement in education. Although this phase marks the end of the career cycle, it also serves as a new beginning for some teachers. Following retirement from classroom teaching, many career educators choose to honor their lifelong commitment to students by continuing to serve the profession in alternative roles. Some move into administrative positions; others pursue new beginnings in higher education (Steffy et al., 2000, p. 9).

### Summary

Because schools are complex cultures to master, it is essential that novices develop dispositions in concert with knowledge and skills that facilitate management of both student learning and the environment. Then, as apprentices, they must be supported in the role of being a teacher. As they are integrating and synthesizing the multifaceted nature of teaching, apprentices can become frustrated and leave the profession. Applying reflective thinking always as a part of the disposition is necessary to foster growth and continued professional development.

Historical data on paraeducator preparation and induction show that paraeducators perform academically as well as their traditional-age peers and they bring the connection of school into their preparation as teachers. Further, they are attuned to school culture and do not experience the classroom shock reported for new teachers. This ongoing immersion into the school's culture facilitates the reflection, growth, and development necessary for lessened attrition from the profession. Armed with confidence and fed with motivation from their students, professional teachers remain in classrooms to become the backbone of the teaching profession. Some from this group become the expert teacher with or without national certification while remaining in the classroom as well as being organizational leaders at the local, state, and national levels.

### Women's Life Roles

Female paraeducators preparing to become teachers have determined that they are going to obtain the competencies necessary to have the lead classroom role. Yet, while they are asserting themselves to advance, they are besieged with a wide variety of thoughts and feelings that lead them to take actions that fracture who they are currently. This fracturing occurs in relationship to self, family (parent and partner), others (friends

and community), and work. Changing from the lower position to the higher position takes the paraeducator through numerous endings and beginnings full of chaos. Yet, there are a number of women who are successful in accomplishing this goal. Having the successful women tell their own stories will add to the literature of women's sense of self in fulfilling aspirations.

### Women's Voice

How women transition through their multifaceted life roles to accomplish any goal is best explored through women's voices. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) define voice as a sense of self and how one makes meaning of the world. Gilligan (1983) purports that women speak with a different voice than men and that women's voice is one that is exploratory rather than decisive. Women's voices have been missing from career ladder aspirations, whether the aspirations are attaining basic literacy for entering a community college, for attaining an undergraduate degree to become a teacher, or for becoming a superintendent.

The interrelatedness of race, class, gender and sexuality impact all lives in such a way that no one theory can explain all oppression and marginalization. However, feminist theorists argue for the inclusion of women's voices in order to expose dominant groups whose power has been perpetuated by societal structures. Proponents seek to question the taken-for-grantedness of the assumptions that have informed traditional research and practice (Grogan, 1996).

Hayes (1989) and Tisdell (1993) stress that socialization, unequal access to power, and educational systems favoring male characteristics (linear, objective, and analytical) have a number of negative effects on women. Results are the devaluing of emotions and relationships, lack of confidence, and low self-esteem in women.

Tisdell (1993) notes that men tend to be socialized for leadership roles with an authoritative style and women tend to be socialized for a support role such as taking care of people. Social conventions define what is expected and accepted for each gender and then consistently devalues feminine characteristics. In reviewing traditional personality theories, Enns (1991) finds that a healthy identity is associated with the dominant western cultural norms of individualism, success, achievement, and self-sufficiency--traits usually assigned masculine labels.

Institutions that fail to blend all the voices risk alienating certain subgroups. Oppression or marginalization of all the voices of difference denies that adult lives are complex and varied. According to Caffarella (1992), women's voices are not just gender related, but also rooted in class, race, age, sexual orientation, and family status and the same is also true for men. A positive contribution of the identification of different voices leads to the validation of other perspectives.



## Women s Stories

Women s career ladder aspirations ranging from basic literacy to obtaining an undergraduate degree to becoming a school leader have been thwarted by norms of socialization, unequal access to power, and educational systems that favor male characteristics. The resulting oppression and marginalization have had negative effects on women which affect their confidence and self-esteem.

Beginning the dream. The first slice of women s stories is a look at women aspiring to attain basic literacy skills. Luttrell (1997) initially conducted 200 semistructured interviews of working-class women about their past to help make sense of their present lives. These women were enrolled in adult basic education classes in Philadelphia (PA) and North Carolina. Luttrell selected 15 women from each program and gathered life stories over a year in their homes for blocks of 2-3 hours at three different times. Analysis of the life stories reveals the intertwining of family life, schooling, work, and relationships with others that coalesce to form one s identity. Conditions of oppression, abuse, and material deprivation served to fragment the women s selves, making it difficult for them to achieve a sense of their authentic or best self (Luttrell, p. 111).

These working-class women s life stories revealed many lessons from the denial of social inequalities and structures of dominance. Schools had failed to recognize their potential by valuing cultural capital (for example, different kinds of knowledge, communication patterns, attitudes) they did not bring with them to school. Consequently, as adult learners, they tended to characterize their aspirations as selfish or to assert that this was not the right time for them to actualize their potential.

Also, these women s stories revealed how cultural and personal images about credibility, value and power were intertwined in ways that tended to keep existing, oppressive power relations intact. To survive and thrive, these women consistently presented split, idealized, and undervalued images of themselves and of others that depicted the stronghold of oppressors like racism, sexism, and elitism.

Participants split views can be gleaned from the following statements. Being schoolwise was not the only or the most important form of knowledge; having common sense and being streetwise and motherwise had got her by in life (Luttrell, 1996, p. 2). Another participant stated, you don t need an education to be smart, but that diploma can really make you feel like a somebody (Luttrell, p. 2).

Resolving the split-self led to these women s quest for new ways of being and acting. They wanted to be seen for who they were, as persons with complex motives and abilities. Their aspiration for mutual recognition fueled their desire for change and propelled their return to school.

Achieving the dream. The second slice of women's stories is a look at women aspiring to attain their first degree. This view focuses specifically on paraeducators because achieving their aspiration of becoming a professional teacher stands as a major force of education and social change. Both the Career Opportunities Program of the 1970s and the Class Ceiling's depiction of the 1990s highlight the transformational and social significance of investing in America's human capital.

The 1970s program was born out of a national climate rife with oppressors like racism, sexism, and elitism. As consumers, the poor and minorities were saddled with poor service delivery by professionals. Further, the poor were barred from achieving professional status by traditional methods of obtaining credentials because this required long periods of education prior to obtaining a job. Although professionals were reluctant initially to accept paraeducators, they soon accepted them gladly as a buffer between themselves and the poor and minority children. Paraeducators were seen as the lesser of two evils (Gartner, Jackson, & Riessman, 1977). The legislation starting this program sought to institute better preparation for a pluralistic society by citing a commitment to change the climate and nature of education of poor and minority children. This same principle pervades the Class Ceiling's 1990s programs. Hiring people indigenous to the poor and minority communities to provide the community services was seen as a way to break the poverty cycle and to improve the quality of and accessibility to these services.

COP saw the paraprofessional as the vital link to the development of consumer power. Proponents contend that

the poor need access to the professions not only for their own economic improvement and security but also to bend the professions to the needs of the poor. Middle-class teachers . . . are inadequate to educate the poor; what is needed are paraprofessionals from the children's own community who can relate to these youngsters and, at the same time, advance in the system. The poor themselves would thereby become involved in social change. (Kaplan, 1977, p. 18)

Kaplan (1977) noted that because the poor are major consumers of human services, these services offer the poor their best attempt to improve their own services. The emphasis here is not to serve the poor in order for them to overcome poverty but to give the poor the opportunity to serve themselves to advance out of poverty. The following two explicit fundamental needs COP was formed to meet highlight this self-help, advancement principle:

Children in low-income settings, who were still in 1970 the victims of multifarious forms of discrimination, would be well served by the presence of neighborhood people who would function as teacher aides or paraprofessionals in their classrooms. To young, poor, minority students, community people would bring identifiable values and perspectives that

would help to bridge the gap between child and education in ways largely unavailable to the regular school staffs, who were still mostly middle-class, majority suburbanites.

Unquantifiable but impressive evidence indicated that the realistic prospect of career advancement for low-income paraprofessional workers in the human service areas could exercise a significant positive influence over the lives of families, neighbors, and whole poverty communities. (p. 4)

The spirit of COP is embodied in some favorite and frequent quotes from a program participant, S. Collier, who went on to obtain the bachelors degree and then continued to a masters degree and a doctorate. She also became a COP program director. Statements demonstrating the advancement-uplift premise follow:

Know yourself before you try to influence or judge others. Think community rather than competition. Try to achieve your potential, but seek ways that other individuals can also achieve theirs. Help each individual to develop his potential to the point where he can find personal satisfaction in his own self worth and dignity as a human being, and has a sense of making a contribution to society (Kaplan, 1977, p. 52).

Although the terminology has changed to community empowerment in the 1990s Class Ceiling programs, the principle of self-help advancement remains very strong. One of the other reasons cited frequently for program creation was fostering community empowerment.

Program directors and paraprofessional themselves told us that career advancement translates into a brighter financial future for the paraprofessional s family; it can also raise the level of other family members educational and career aspirations. Beyond the family circle, such career development adds to the social capital of low-income and minority communities, and better connects schools with the fabric of the communities they serve (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996, p. 27).

When we transform a paraprofessional, usually the head of household, who comes here not knowing what she can accomplish and goes on to become a teacher maybe a principal, we empower not just that individual but her entire family. Her children, her relatives become excited by education (Haselkorn & Fideler, p. 27).

Over the 20 year span from COP to Class Ceiling, the advancement-uplift principle remains in tact for persons striving to obtain their bachelors degree to advance from paraeducator to professional teacher. Haselkorn & Fideler (1996) quoted program

participant, Maria Barrientos, who went on to obtain a masters degree, to demonstrate this principle:

Where I live and work it s the inner city I see these kids in poverty, though their parents may be hard working. I grew up just like them, and I feel I have so much to give to help them grow and become better people. They need to know it s OK to dream, even though they come from the inner city and they come home to an empty house after school. They can make it as long as they try and work hard. And I want to communicate with the parents, let them know I m just like them and I m there to help their children. Being bilingual, it will be easier for me than for those other teachers who don t speak the parents language (Haselkorn & Fideler, pp. 26-27).

The dream hits the ceiling. The last slice of women s stories is a look at women aspiring to attain school leadership positions. This view focuses on women seeking top level administrative K-12 positions. Grogan (1996) examined the lived experience of 27 self-identified women who aspired to become superintendents. Face-to-face, open-ended, indepth interviews of 60-90 minutes were conducted in settings convenient to participants. The following five findings from these women s voices reveal that the oppressors racism, sexism, and elitism are still pervasive in thwarting aspirations.

First, as with the basic literacy and the initial degree women, the personal and professional lives of these women are inextricably intertwined. Their stories also amplify the power of expected and accepted norms of behavior that insidiously result in fragmentation for survival. Also, the white male dominated nature of the K-12 superintendency was revealed clearly.

Second, some alternative approaches to leadership emerged because the old boy network is entrenched solidly at this level of leadership. Many of Grogan s (1996) participants expressed that women must have the same traditional preparation including having been a principal, preferably at the high school level as men. However, some women expressed that they had alternate experiences (for example, instructional leadership at the building and district levels; district-wide program development; personnel supervision; and budget management) that qualified them for the superintendency. In spite of these varied alternative experiences, school boards have not seen them as viable for being the superintendent.

Third, gender looms as a major feature in women s preparation for the superintendency and exemplifies the male-female power relationships from everyday life. Participants were seen as women first and then as administrators. A woman whose administrative style is aggressive is judged as unprofessional and she is not acceptable as a woman either. Although lifestyle and sexuality are judged conservatively for both men and women, women do not have the latitude within either afforded men. Women are

expected to be married. If they are not married, they are subjected to stereotypes of promiscuity or homosexuality. The same not-married status for men establishes their heterosexuality.

Fourth, women acted in a variety of ways to circumvent some of the structures that were potentially inhibiting by striving for balance among the competing life roles. Their flexibility in negotiating life roles suggests possible shifts in the relationships of work, parent, and partner. Some of the women felt fragmented because of the pull of the amount of time required by the work life role into the other life roles. The time demand of education administration cut into the time for duties these women associated with rearing children, maintaining relationships with spouse/partner, and homemaking-including unpaid housework. Many participants related stories of broken relationships and divorces. With the high-demand work, participants refused to accept the female responsibility for maintaining relationships. The intertwining of the personal and professional life roles are not contradictory for men and fail to have the same effect.

Fifth, these women have resisted discouragement and they have held on to their aspirations in the face of difficulties. Because they are nontraditional leaders in the education administration environment, they have not always been valued by their peers or supervisors. Several have already applied unsuccessfully for superintendencies and they attributed their lack of success to experience.

By eschewing the win-lose, competition-minded approach to problem-solving and practicing and valuing diverse voice, they have brought an added dimension to school leadership. By including voices similar and dissimilar to their own, they have expanded a vision that provides multiple ways to conceive and solve a problem. They seek to lead through others and to connect with and involve a wider community in accomplishing goals.

### Summary

These women seeking the top K-12 position, the superintendency, have demonstrated the principle of advancement against high odds as did the women at the previous two levels. These women were aspiring to advance to help others reach their potential and they used alternate ways and means to negotiate the sometimes turbulent trek to their goal. McCartney's quote demonstrates the advancement-uplift premise:

They [females] see education as a kind of great equalizer; it's the one area that some of our really poor and downtrodden and underprivileged children still have; they're not going to inherit money. . . . Education is the one area that they have to work themselves out of some of the poverty or living conditions that they may be being raised in, and it's the one kind of hope that you can hold out for them (Grogan, 1996, p. 189).

Adding female paraeducator voices to the literature on career aspirations can explicate this particular group of women's sense of making meaning in the educational arena. Transition experiences through the multifaceted roles also can explicate some taken-for-granted assumptions which further oppression and marginalization when all talent in schools should be maximized.

### Minority Women

Minority women encounter the same travails as the women in the stories above. Each of the three groups contained African American women. Four of the 27 aspiring superintendents and 15 of the basic literacy group were African American. However, just as the women in the superintendent-aspirant group articulated that they were seen first for their gender and then their position, the same is true for African American women. The difference is that African Americans are seen first for their race, then gender, and then position. The interrelatedness of race, gender, and class impact minority women's lives in a way that magnifies oppression and marginalization regardless of the life role. Minority women's stories from the basic literacy and aspiring superintendent groups will be used to show the intertwining of the life roles (relationship with self, family, others, and work) and the particular impact on African American women's advancement. Then, the intertwining impact on the paraeducators will be presented.

### Minority Beginning Dreamers

According to Luttrell (1996), the gender, race, and class identities and struggles were different for the Philadelphia (white) women and the North Carolina (African American) women. The women's stories show that they arrived at different identities through their participation in schools, families, communities, and workplaces (Luttrell, p. 117).

The African American women were torn between asserting themselves and censoring their visibility. They accepted being labeled as slow learners during their formative school years but rejected the book learning as the real intelligence of adulthood. As adults, the real intelligence [was] their abilities to outwit or endure white racism (Luttrell, 1996, p. 116). Although they identified with their teachers, Their relationships with teachers were mixed with feelings of love, dependence, shame, and rejection (Luttrell, p.117). Because African Americans could not be in the front and had to work in the back, vocational choices for these working-class women were limited. This in-the-back, not-having-to-see Blacks served to censor these women's visibility.

As mothers, they were split between the good and bad mother because they were not able to be the idealized mother (Luttrell, 1996, p. 104). The cultural picture of the ideal mother can be labeled as follows: domestic, cookies and milk kind of mom; super strong, self-sacrificing kind of mom; the career, super-woman kind of mom. These

women were hurt by their mothers' subservience when they should have spoken up for their children or demonstrated resistance to employers. The North Carolina women discussed motherhood as part of, not separate from, their work lives (Luttrell, p. 51). In retrospect, even though the basic literacy women might have wished for more attention and affection, they saw their mothers' physical care and mere survival especially at work as acts of maternal love.

The North Carolina women arrived at their identities and self valuations in subordination to and resistance against several communities: the larger white racist community; the urban, professional, and middle-class community of blacks who looked down on them because of their country ways; and the community of black men who could get them to lose their (common) senses (Luttrell, 1996, p. 117).

Luttrell (1996) posited that these stories illustrate that identity formation and struggles are about the personal choices people make. Women have doubts throughout the personal choices and they devise strategies and exert great effort toward the self transformation needed to accomplish their goals and aspirations.

#### Minority Dreamers Hit the Ceiling

Although the aspiring superintendents use a variety of alternative approaches to leadership, there is a need for different points of resistance to be recognized among women administrators who are also women of color (Grogan, 1996, p. 190). African American women often described the dislocation they felt as they moved in and out of different cultures.

As with the working-class women, the African American aspiring superintendents often experienced a sense of severe fragmentation. There was the need to continually shift styles of behavior and language. Grogan (1996) used the following quote from Courtney to show how the intersection of race and gender complicates her approach to leadership.

In our and when I say our I refer to our African American environment for the most of us, the skills that make us most successful in that environment are not appreciated in the work environment, such as we have to be assertive, we have to be aggressive, we have to be directive; that's kind of a role that helps our families to succeed. Those particular skills are the ones we're most criticized for in the work environment, but it's a part of us. It's a part of what helps many African American women survive and succeed. When you come into the work environment, very often you're evaluated down, often because that's the way you are, so you have to find yourself saying, OK, wait a minute, I've got to shift now from what's natural and normal for me to try to be participatory in terms of style

and collaborative in massaging, and it gets to be stressful because it's not your natural state of being. (p. 89)

The roles of family and work continue to be intertwined so much so that one aspirant said, "It just tears you apart in terms of trying to commit to both" (Grogan, 1996, p. 113). Some participants expressed uncertainty about going for top administrator positions again because either the family or the job suffers too much. However, another African American aspirant resisted the traditional school administration strategies by devising a novel strategy. She took a major risk by delegating some of her responsibilities as principal. She made others responsible for parts of her job to allow her to meet the demands of three small children at home. These women used various strategies in handling homemaking responsibilities. They ranged from the superwoman who handled all the children, laundry, household, and cooking responsibilities to the fully-shared family where children and husband shared these responsibilities.

### Minority Dream Achievers

Finally, the intertwining of the life roles' impact on African American women seeking the initial degree to make the transition from paraeducator to teacher is addressed. COP people led three distinct lives: full-time work in the schools, a crushing academic load, and, because most were mothers, the domestic life that seemed inevitably to be the first to be neglected (Kaplan, 1977, p. 47). Haselkorn & Fideler (1996) report the same intense intertwining. The all-encompassing nature of these roles is too heavy for some participants. Many are able to exhibit the extraordinary dedication and dexterity to accomplish their goals but as many as one-third last less than one year (Kaplan, 1977).

Lack of self-esteem is identified as one of the problems for paraeducators pursuing teacher preparation. This feeling plagues even the academically high-performing paraeducators. They doubt whether they can compete because they have been out of school for so long and the changes in campus culture, including technology (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996). However, those who stay are the embodiment of the nation's best qualities: very good students and highly sought employees who were effective teachers in their communities (Carter, 1977; Kaplan, 1977).

In both the 1970 and the 1990 programs, the major hurdle to overcome in achieving one's aspirations is financial. In the 1970s, the focus is bringing people into the labor market whereas in the 1990s the focus is the inability to give up even meager salaries needed for family life. The finances coupled with family support can be problematic. Many times the family is supportive but at other times the husband verbally abuses the wife because he feels threatened. Further dissension occurs from children in the family who feel their lives or wants are disrupted (Genzuk, Lavandez, & Krashen, 1994; Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996).



Community members, peers, and teachers are reported to be obstacles to paraeducator transition to teacher. Although a small number, Haselkorn & Fideler (1996) find that 8% of the programs surveyed report resistance to para becoming teachers as one of the barriers to career advancement. In these indigenous communities, some community members disapprove of wives getting more education than their husbands. Sometimes, peers and teachers at the school put the paraeducators down by reminding them that they are just a para instead of a potential teacher. Peers confront the paraeducators with questions such as, Who do you think you are? (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996).

### Summary

Barriers to advancement are amplified when the aspirant is Black and female. Blocks are encountered in all the multifaceted life roles. In the family, there can be dissension from the children and the partner. In the community, friends may try to assuage the traditional power of the husband by minimizing the paraeducators schooling and visible changes. At work, teachers and other paraeducators may try to discourage continuation toward the paraeducator's goal of becoming a teacher. Then, the paraeducator herself may doubt that she can even do the work because of lack of the necessary cultural capital. With all of these barriers, I wonder why paraeducators make the transition to teachers? Further, I wonder what methodological approach can I use to capture minority women's stories who have been successful in overcoming barriers to make the transition from paraeducator to teacher?

### Phenomenology As A Way of Describing

### the Lived Experience of Minority Women

Black female paraeducators who successfully advance to the teacher position undergo a wealth of experiences which, when told, may benefit others seeking to make this emotional and physical transition. Having these successful women tell their own stories will allow another perspective on the multifaceted life roles in minority women's lived experiences.

People's stories are a way of both sharing and understanding their culture. Seidman (1998) says that stories are a way of knowing and that the telling of stories is a meaning-making process.

When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness. Every whole story, Aristotle tells us, has a beginning, a middle, and an end. In order to give the details of their experience a beginning, middle, and end, people must reflect on their experience. It is this process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and

thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience. . . . Individuals' consciousness gives access to the most complicated social and educational issues, because social and educational issues are abstractions based on the concrete experience of people (Seidman, 1998, p. 1).

Van Manen (1997) says that the educator, as author, attempts to capture life experience (action or event) in anecdote or story, because the logic of story is precisely that story retrieves what is unique, particular, and irreplaceable (p. 152). As a means of uncovering the essence of the paraeducators' stories, I look to the qualitative method of phenomenology. I will use Max van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology to explicate the meaning and significance of the thoughts, feelings and actions of paraeducators making a career change. A phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998, p. 51).

Since phenomenology seeks to describe rather than explain, this qualitative method of research is applicable to phenomena important to career transition. Through uncovering perceptions and interpretations of participant and researcher, phenomenological study reveals findings valuable to the profession of teaching which is interwoven in the life experience of paraeducators.

Phenomenology seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences (Van Manen, 1997, p. 9). It is a theory of the unique (p. 7) and does not allow for generalization to the broader population but it does allow for validation of the phenomena in the lifeworld and the human understanding that emanates from this exploration. Because phenomenology asks meaning questions, it does not set out to solve problems as is the case in empirical research. Meaning questions are designed to lead us to a better or deeper understanding in order to be able to act more thoughtfully in certain situations.

Phenomenology focuses on the structure and essence of an experience, especially the emotions, relationships, and culture (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1997). Consequently, perceptions, feelings, and actions are integral parts of phenomenological study. In this approach, the shared experiences among individuals possess an essence of the lived experiences. The essence is an indispensable, essential conceptual characteristic. In other words, essence is the act of existing and phenomenology seeks to understand the existence of commonly shared feelings, emotions, and experiences. The aim is to construct an animating, evocative description (text) of human actions, behaviors, intentions, and experiences as we meet them in the lifeworld (Van Manen, p. 19).

Van Manen's (1997) methodology requires that I view the participants from an individual, a holistic, and a contextual perspective that values their experiences and

untold life stories. This requirement is in concert with teaching in today's multicultural schools.

Van Manen's (1997) particular focus is hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermeneutics is concerned with how people come to understand, interpret, and articulate essences. Through textual analysis, hermeneutics cultivates the

contributing to one's thoughtfulness and one's ability to act toward others, children and adults, with tact or tactfulness. . . . Its particular appeal is that it tries to understand the phenomena of education by maintaining a view of pedagogy as an expression of the whole. (Van Manen, p. 7)

Ultimately, hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on language, including text, to understand a person's existence (Tesch, 1990). Hermeneutics is fundamentally a writing activity with the researcher as the conduit for the text.

Van Manen (1997) purports that the question and the way of understanding the question provides the starting point and the ending point for research. This hermeneutic circle requires that the interplay between the question and methodology as a dialectic process must remain consistent with the intent and purpose of the particular study. Van Manen's (2000) methodological process includes three primary perspectives. First, phenomenology provides a description of a person's orientation to the lived experience. Next, hermeneutics provides the interpretation of the texts of the lived experience. The third perspective, semiotics, provides the voice to phenomenology and hermeneutics through a linguistic, writing approach. In this process, I gain an understanding of the lived experience of the phenomenon from a narrative description or written answer to a study question. Then, I interpret the essences contained within the description.

Van Manen (1997; 2000) identifies several important concepts to guide me in my study. He stresses the necessity of providing a very clear description of the phenomenon in the lifeworld so the reader may recognize it as the narrated experience. As a part of the process, evocation provides a clear, crisp, and real presence of a phenomenon in such a manner that it elicits thoughtful responses. In intensification, the writer provides words with their full value. The writer should massage the text to provide fuller explication of meanings but not to condense thoughts or phrases into a summary which results in loss of meaning. Silence is powerful and necessary in hermeneutic phenomenology. So, the writer must allow tone and silence to speak to the reader in a noncognitive way. By so doing, one ascertains an intuitive grasp of the meaning of the phenomenon in question. These concepts add layered depth to the phenomenological understanding of the experience through the textual interpretation. Through this layering, the lived experience becomes an active engagement between the participants and the researcher.

In the hermeneutic phenomenological process, I engage with participants both as a part and a whole of their experiences and untold life stories. I attempt to capture the paraeducators' life experiences, thoughts, feelings, and actions in stories or anecdotes because their stories provide the text of what is unique, particular, and irreplaceable in making the career change from paraeducator to teacher. Further, using the logic of a story (that is, the beginning, middle, and end) provides a frame for recalling and reflecting upon salient details of the lived experience that makes sense of the experience.

In summary, Van Manen's (1997) view of human science as critically oriented action research merges in a powerful way with exploring the lifeworlds of paraeducators because

phenomenological research does not start or proceed in a disembodied fashion. It is always a project of someone: a real person, who, in the context of particular individual, social, and historical life circumstances sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence. (p. 31)

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

The aim of self-study research is to provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm and settle. (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001)

In this chapter, I provide the details of hermeneutic phenomenology for data development and management. Following the purpose and the study question, I shared the rationale for using qualitative inquiry. In sharing the specific design for my study, I detailed Van Manen's (1997) hermeneutic phenomenology which included a six-step process. I shared my role, identified aspects of my respectful relationship with the participants, and explained the setting of their lived experiences. I used in-depth phenomenological interviewing to gather the stories of the participants' experiences. So, I provided details about Seidman's (1998) three-interview approach. I addressed traditional criteria for analyzing data in qualitative inquiry. However, I also addressed emerging criteria that have liberatory potential for persons whose voices have been silent, disengaged, or marginalized.

For data management, I used a format designed to capture thoughts, feelings, and actions across active life roles throughout the lived experiences of this group of paraeducators who made the transition to teachers. Data management and analysis were closely woven; therefore, the designed format allowed for consistent exploration of data across each of the three interviews for each participant.

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of beginning minority teachers who had made the transition within the classroom from paraeducators to qualified teachers. The intent of the study was to give voice to those paraeducators who had aspired and achieved so that other paraeducators could imagine a similar success. The following question lay at the heart of this inquiry: What is the lived experience of paraeducators who make the transition to teacher? The lived experiences of a group of five paraeducators in the consortium school districts in their transition from paraeducators to professional teachers was explored. Very few studies exploring paraeducators' experiences exist; so, a phenomenological study devoted to understanding their lived experiences was designed to study this question.

#### Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

I chose qualitative research methods because this approach allowed for exploration of meaning from the participants' perspective while enhancing understanding of the paraeducator-to-teacher transition. In qualitative inquiry, initial curiosities for research often come from real-world observations, emerging from the interplay of the researcher's direct experience, tacit theories, political commitments, interests in practice,

and growing scholarly interests (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 25). My direct experience with paraeducators engaged in the worlds of work and teacher preparation peaked my interest in why some expressed desire but never began, why some began but stopped, and why some pursued to obtain their goal. All of these paraeducators were persons who had learned about the Model Teacher Education Consortium (MTEC) and were taking advantage of MTEC's informational resources. The pursuers were taking full advantage of MTEC's resources of information, on-site advisement, on-site registration, and payment for courses and books. As I listened to these paraeducators in advisement sessions and in my classes, I wondered what resources and practices might facilitate the career change from paraeducator to teacher.

Some features of qualitative inquiry made it the preferred approach for elucidating the lived experiences of these paraeducators. Miles and Huberman (1994) provided eight features common to qualitative research. Qualitative inquiry happens through intense contact with a field or life situation where the researcher's role is to gain a holistic view of the context. The main purpose was to uncover ways people in specific settings come to understand, act upon, and manage their daily situations. The researcher is essentially the main measurement device in the study (Miles & Huberman, p. 7) as he/she engages from the inside the context to elicit data from the participants. The researcher suspends or brackets preconceptions about the discussion topic. Then, through reading and rereading the data, . . . the researcher may isolate certain themes and expressions that can be reviewed with informants, but that should be maintained in their original forms throughout the study (Miles & Huberman, p. 7). Most analysis, done with words, could be manipulated in a variety of ways to lead to one of the many possible interpretations of the data.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the nature of qualitative research has strengths for studying human science. One major feature is that they focus on *naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings* (italics included), so that we have a strong handle on what real life is like (Miles & Huberman, p. 10). As such, data were collected in the context on a specific case. Another strength is their *richness and holism* (italics included), with strong potential for revealing complexity . . . (Miles & Huberman, p. 10) with vivid descriptions. Qualitative data were collected over a period of time which allowed for how and why things happen as opposed to obtaining a snapshot in time. Qualitative research's emphasis on the lived experience was ideal for uncovering people's meanings of events, processes, and life structures. Finally, qualitative research was suggested as the best strategy for discovering and exploring a new area.

### The Type of Design

I used phenomenology as the qualitative approach for my study because it encouraged participants' description from a holistic, contextual, and individual

perspective that valued their experiences and untold life stories. Specifically, phenomenology in this study assisted in the analysis and conceptualization of the meaning and significance of the paraeducators' transition experiences. Phenomenology rests on an assumption that there is a structure and essence to shared experiences that can be narrated (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 112).

According to Moustakas (1994),

the aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions general or universal meanings are derived, in other words the essences or structure of the experience. . . . The understanding of meaningful concrete relations implicit in the original description of experience in the context of a particular situation is the primary target of phenomenological knowledge. (pp. 13-14)

Max van Manen's (1997) hermeneutic phenomenology guided the design of my study. Hermeneutics is concerned with how people come to understand, interpret, and articulate essences. Some hermeneutic phenomenologists propose that human actions resemble the way a written text appears to a reader (Tesch, 1990, p. 37). Hermeneutic phenomenology focused on language, including text, to understand a person's existence. The narrative story formed the text which was written and rewritten and read and reread for the uncovering of themes or essences unique to this experience. Phenomenology, a theory of the unique, does not allow for generalization to the broader population. However, it does allow for validation of the phenomena in the lifeworld and the human understanding that comes from this exploration.

Van Manen (1997) provides a six-step process for pursuing human science research (see Appendix A--Data Collection and Analysis in Hermeneutic Phenomenology). All steps rely heavily on language as a means of providing expression to the experiences. Turning to the nature of the lived experience, the first step, is concerned with the exploration of the lived experience in retrospect. A person cannot reflect on a phenomenon while experiencing it. This reflection occurs through language which ties phenomenology and understanding together for explication of meaning and essences. The resultant written text of the experience provides a narrative of the phenomenon as perceived by the person who experienced it. The researcher must make his/her preassumptions explicit in order to prevent their interference with the investigation. Bracketing preassumptions is necessary because the researcher serves as the conduit for expressing the experience.

In the second step, Investigating Experience As We Live It, the researcher explores the phenomenon from all aspects but the starting point is personal experiences. The researcher extends the investigation to include other people's experiences *because*

*they allow us to become more experienced ourselves* (italics included) (Van Manen, 1997, p. 62). To obtain descriptions of personal experiences from others, interviewing is suggested as one of the methods. The focus must remain on the research question by asking specific questions and seeking clarification of particular points, as needed. In the hermeneutic interview, because the researcher can go back and again to dialogue with the interviewee about the ongoing record of the interview transcript (Van Manen, p. 63), the interviewee becomes a collaborator in the project. Other methods of investigation include close observation, literature, biography, diaries/journals/logs, and art.

In step three, Hermeneutic Phenomenological Reflection, the researcher explicates the essences themes or structure of the phenomenon. According to Van Manen (1997), *'Theme is the experience of focus, of meaning, or point* (italics included) (p. 87) and also *the needfulness or desire to make sense* (italics included) (p. 88). Themes and essences surface through reading and rereading the text as a whole. The researcher and participants interpret the significance of the preliminary themes in light of the original phenomenological question (Van Manen, p. 99). The human lifeworld is complex because a person has many roles (lifeworlds) and may inhabit different lifeworlds at different times of the day (for example, the lived world of work and the lived world of home). Therefore, one must find commonalities for questioning, reflecting, and writing about the ways people experience the world.

Writing as a means of identifying themes is Van Manen's fourth step, Hermeneutic Phenomenological Writing. Writing allows for a reflective thoughtful approach to exploring the themes by permitting distance between the experience and the narration of the experience. Writing gives appearance to thought by creating signifying relations. These signifying relations through reflection condense into a discursive whole or theory which becomes the text. This writing and rewriting, responsive-reflective writing is the very activity of doing phenomenology (Van Manen, 1997, p. 131). Writing provides a textual reflection which provides a means for explicating themes.

Van Manen's fifth step, Maintaining a Strong and Oriented Relation, addresses pedagogy, or connecting with the lifeworlds of children. Pedagogy itself is a mode of life that always and by definition deals with practical action (Van Manen, 1997, p. 154). In pedagogy, one continuously redeems, regains, retrieves and recaptures in reflecting on one's connections with children for a sense of what is good for children. The practical action of personal engagement with children in the setting leads the researcher or teacher to remain focused on going below the surface and extracting what is best for the child. This reflection allows one to become more thoughtful or aware of aspects of human life that previously were minimized or taken for granted. The resulting action will more likely bring us to the edge of speaking up, speaking out, or decisively acting in social situations (Van Manen, p. 154). This strong orientation allows the researcher to provide deeper, fuller, and richer textual explorations of the lived experiences.



The final step, Balancing the Research Context by Considering Parts and Wholes, stresses that the textual approach one takes in the phenomenological study should largely be decided in terms of the nature of the phenomenon being addressed, and the investigative method that appears appropriate to it (Van Manen, 1997, p. 173). The researcher must identify explicitly the inability to generalize the findings and themes explicated for this one specific study or text. Further, the researcher must stay focused on the topic in order to address the research question. The balancing must occur throughout the process and it concludes the hermeneutic circle.

All steps rely on language to provide expression to the experiences. Van Manen (1997) stresses that the researcher must acknowledge and capture silence as a form of interpretive language because it has meaning and context in the data-collection process. These six steps provide the methodology for exploring the lived experience from a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective.

### My Role

Van Manen (1997) identified the role of the researcher as one of collaborator in the process of reflecting on a participant's experience. I served as a data collection tool because I entered the lives of the participants in this qualitative investigation (Marshall & Rossman; 1999 Miles & Huberman, 1994). I used audiotape, pen, and paper to capture data. Each session was audiotaped and I made relevant notes on both lined paper and the interview guide sheet as the session progressed.

I already had familiarity with the participants because of having taught them or having directed their teacher education program. Because of the time frame of this engagement with many types of interaction, a certain level of trust existed already. To promote continued trust, I was very open about the nature and purpose of the study, time requirements, use and storage of data, anonymity, and participant verification of data. I informed and gave participants the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the transcription when all three interviews were completed. I mailed the three completed transcriptions to participants with a letter asking for review and clarification if needed. I followed up with a phone call after one week to ascertain any need for clarification or revision. Further, I interviewed participants in their natural environment or an environment of their choosing which provided seclusion and freedom from interruptions (Van Manen, 1997). Interviews were held at school, home, or a private office free from distractions. I adhered to ethical standards for investigations involving human subjects as specified by the university.

### The Participants

I explored the personal experiences of African American female paraeducators who had negotiated successfully procedures to become teachers. The participants had worked as paraeducators and were teaching currently in one of the Model Teacher

Education Consortium (MTEC) school districts. The paraeducators had completed the novice phase and were engaged currently as teachers in the apprentice phase as defined by Steffy et al. (2000). They had completed their novice phase at the public university.

The following profile of the participants emerged. The five African American females had an average age of 34.2 years and ranged in age from 24 to 42 when they entered the four-year institution and an average age of 35.6 years when they began the novice phase (that is, admission to the teacher education program) of their preparation. Four were married currently and one was recently divorced. All participants had children with an average of 2.6 children per participant. Three participants had preschool and elementary age children while the other two had high school or just finished high school age children.

The participants had worked as a paraeducator for an average of 7 years with this experience ranging from two years to 12 years. Only two participants had less than five years as a paraeducator. As paraeducators seeking the dream of becoming a teacher, they had an average drive of 57 minutes one-way with drives ranging from 30 minutes to 2½ hours to the university.

The paraeducators had similar teacher preparation experiences during their novice phase. Four completed this phase during the same spring semester and the other one completed this phase during the contiguous summer term. The participants completed their teacher preparation program with a grade point average of 3.3. They had an average of 3.1 years toward completing the dream of requirements to become a licensed teacher. For three of the participants, this dream resulted in obtaining her first degree. With this degree, she became the first in her family to obtain a four-year degree. The other two participants had four-year degrees but did not have jobs for which those degrees were required.

All participants were teaching currently in one of the teacher consortium school districts. Four were teachers in elementary schools and one was a special education teacher in a high school. With her years of teaching experience, each participant was at the end of her apprentice phase as defined by Steffy et al. (2000).

### Gaining Access and Entry

Although I already had a relationship with the participants, it was necessary that I build an interview relationship (Seidman, 1998). Initially, I contacted the participants for my study by telephoning them to acquaint them with the topic of study and to secure some of their time for providing more details about their role and my role in the study. After participants agreed to collaborate in this study with me, I made a follow-up telephone call to arrange an appointment for beginning the interview process.

Assurance of confidentiality. Seidman (1998) said that the nature of in-depth interviewing falls within the purview of federal guidelines protecting the rights of human subjects for three basic reasons. First, the topic took place within the life context of the participant which may bring forth some sensitive issues. Second, even with masking for anonymity, the interviews were recorded which could lead to exposure by someone who knows the participant. Third, ramifications of exposure are unknown and could not be determined in advance.

In my study, I addressed six of the seven categories Seidman (1998) said should be covered in informed consent. First, participants were told the purpose of what they were being asked to do and by whom and given the freedom to participate or not to participate. Second, participants were informed of any risks, including any vulnerability because of what he or she said. Third, participants volunteered to participate in this study. Fourth, participants were informed of their right to review the material and the right to withdraw from the process. Fifth, procedures for anonymity detailed whether participants' names would be used or whether pseudonyms will be used. Finally, participants indicated clearly their agreement to release the interview material to be disseminated. Participants were informed that there would be no benefit in any way, monetarily or otherwise, from participating in the study. All these components were contained on the consent form. I used a special consent form to secure confidentiality from the transcriptionist. These procedures provided clear accountability for all parties and fostered open and trusting relations between the participants and me.

### The Setting

The rural northeastern part of the state, the birthplace of the Model Teacher Education Consortium (MTEC), was the setting for my study. Participants had been paraeducators in this region of the state and they were teaching in this region at the time of this inquiry. Participants had obtained their preparation for teaching from a university located in the northeast. This university was one of the public four-year institution partners in the Consortium. By 1997, the consortium had grown from the initial nine school districts to encompass an additional nine school district partners to bring total school district participation to eighteen.

I provide additional detail so one may get a feel for the area traversed by the participants. The closest interstate is north across the state line. Within the state, the closest interstate is two hours to 2½ hours one-way going west toward the capital city. Going west from the easternmost region is a full span of 4-lane highway. For the participant with the 2½ hour one-way drive to the university, there was a partial span of 4-lane highway. Most of her drive was over 2-lane, winding highways. As one traverses the consortium region specified in this study, he/she gets to appreciate the pastoral view. Agriculture is the mainstay and fields are populated primarily with vegetable crops, peanuts, and tobacco.

One does not travel very far without going over one of the many bridges in this region. Access to the university from both the south and the east necessitate traveling over at least one bridge. Traveling from the west does not require going over a bridge but one must travel along the Dismal Swamp over a dual-lane highway with some portion of it bordered by the deep canal on one side and swamp on the other side. Bridges or swamp was the travel route for the participants. This region claims both the smallest and the largest counties, geographically. The area is sparsely populated; therefore many school buses are used to try to lessen student riding time. Schools are spread across the expanse of the counties and driving times reflect this spread.

### Data Collection Procedures

Data collection occurred as outlined in the second step of Van Manen's (1997) six-step process, *Investigating Experience As We Live It*. Because the interview was crucial in data collection, I used the in-depth, phenomenological method. The primary advantage of phenomenological interviewing is that it permits an explicit focus on the researcher's personal experience combined with those of the interviewees (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 113). Often the phenomenological interview begins with a social conversation or a brief meditative activity aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). I began the first interview session with conversation focused on being updated about participants and their families.

### Interview Procedure

Seidman's (1998) in-depth, phenomenological interviewing was used to engage participants in elucidating their experiences. I conducted three interviews, each one having a specific purpose, with each participant. People's behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them. Without context there is little possibility of exploring the meaning of an experience (Seidman, p. 11). According to purpose, the first interview established the context of the participants' experience, the second allowed reconstruction of details of the experience within the context, and the third encouraged reflection on the meaning of this experience. Each interview was 90 minutes long.

In interview one, the focused life history, the interviewer's task is to put the participant's experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about himself or herself in light of the topic up to the present time (Seidman, 1998, p. 11). I constructed an interview guide (see Appendix A, Focused Life History--Interview #1 Interview Guide) in which participants were asked to tell about their past lives until the time they became teachers. I asked participants to reconstruct their early experiences in their families, in school and work, with friends, and in their neighborhood in relation to their wanting to become a teacher. Since the focus was the lived experience of paraeducators who made the transition to teacher, I explored the participants' past

experiences as paraeducators. By asking participants to put their teaching in the context of their life history, I focused on how they came to be instead of why they came to be. In asking how, I expected participants to reconstruct a range of constitutive events in their past family, school and work, and other (friends and community) experiences that placed their new role as teacher in the context of their lives. I asked participants to reconstruct a range of events that placed their participation in the Model Teacher Education Consortium (MTEC) and in the teacher education program at the university.

The purpose of the second interview was to focus on the concrete details of the participants' present experience as a teacher. Using my interview guide for this session (see Appendix B, Details of the Current Experience--Interview #2 Interview Guide), I asked participants to reconstruct details relating to me what they do as teachers. To ensure that participants put their experiences within the context of the social setting, I asked them to talk about their relationships with their students, colleagues, administrators, parents, paraeducators, and the wider community. As a means of ensuring that I got details, I asked participants to provide me with stories about their experience as teachers.

Exact details in the first two interviews was crucial for the meaning-making nature of interview three. Since interviews one and two provided the storied details of past and present experiences, I encouraged participants to describe specific experiences, recalling them from the moment they occurred, as if in real time. This discouraged interpretation and causal explanations by focusing on reliving in the current tense rather than philosophizing about the experiences (Van Manen, 1997). Participants described actual events and the feelings associated with those events.

In the third interview, participants were asked to reflect on the meaning of their experience. In this sense, meaning addressed the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life. I used my interview guide for this session (see Appendix C, Reflection on the Meaning--Interview #3 Interview Guide) to focus on meaning-making questions in which participants reflected upon description of experiences in interviews one and two or took a future orientation (Seidman, 1998). The question became, "Given what you have said about your life before you became a teacher and given what you have said about your work now, how do you understand your experiences enroute to becoming a teacher? What sense does it make to you?" The future oriented question was, "Given what you have reconstructed in these interviews, where do you see yourself going in the future?"

Making meaning required participants to look at how the factors in their lives had interacted to bring them to their present situation. To establish conditions for reflecting upon what they are now doing in their lives, it was necessary to combine the exploration of the past to amplify the events that had led participants to where they are now

(interview one) and the describing of the concrete details of their present experience (interview two).

Although the specific purpose of interview three was making meaning, participants essentially made meaning in each of the three interviews. The very process of putting experience into language is a meaning-making process (Seidman, 1998, p. 12). Further, when participants told stories of their lived experience, they framed it with a beginning, a middle, and an end and in so doing made it meaningful.

### Data Collection

Since I, the researcher, was the main measurement device, I had to apply techniques appropriate for eliciting the focused data from participants. This self-as-instrument process

demands techniques of observation that allow the investigator to sort and winnow the data, searching out patterns of association and assumption. . . . It is necessary to listen not only with the tidiest and most precise of one's cognitive abilities, but also with the whole of one's experience and imagination. . . . The investigator must use his or her experience and imagination to find (or fashion) a match for the patterns evidenced by the data. (McCracken, 1988, p. 19)

I shared my study question with the participants and had them focus on this phenomenon without providing opinions or editorializing about it. In order to facilitate participants' responses that allowed for explicating meanings and essences of experiences, I employed the following five researcher-as-instrument techniques for appropriate active engagement.

First, I used appropriate questioning strategies. After establishing the research concern in the overview, I began the process with the broad open-ended question and let follow-up questions flow from participants' responses. I used both types of Seidman's (1998) open-ended questions that were pertinent to in-depth interviewing, the grand- or mini-tour question and the subjective experience question. The grand tour question asked the participant to reconstruct a significant segment of an experience. An example is,

Reconstruct your day from the time you wake up until the time you go to bed. The mini-tour open-ended question asked the participant to reconstruct details in a more limited time span (for example, your first teacher preparation course) or of a particular experience (for example, actions taken to go off the payroll for student teaching).

The subjective experience question delved beneath the external structure of the event. An example is that a prospective teacher reconstructed teaching her first lesson during the methods course while being rated by her colleagues. Once she finished this story, I asked her to talk about what that experience was like for her.

Second, I listened much more than I talked. Listening is an extremely important skill in interviewing. As Seidman (1998) instructed, I listened on three levels. First, in listening to the participant, I concentrated on the substance to make sure I understood it and to determine if ample detail was being given. Second, I listened to discern whether the participant was relating experiences with an outer, more public voice or an inner voice. The outer voice is the one used when talking to a group with which one needs to maintain a distance. Expression using the inner voice is more thoughtful, personal, and more descriptive of the action or feeling. Third, I listened while remaining aware of the process as well as the substance. I attended to the following in listening for substance: time during the interview; how much had been covered and how much more needed to be covered; participants' energy level and any nonverbal cues needing attention; and pacing of the interview. To support these three types of listening, I took notes which helped me concentrate on what the participant was saying.

Third, I avoided using active listening in which the interviewer would reinforce the participants' responses. Active listening encourages such phrases as "what I hear you saying is . . ." (McCracken, 1988, p. 21). I avoided reinforcing either positively or negatively or violating the law of nondirection, that is, suggesting terms participants could use in describing their experience (McCracken, 1988; Seidman, 1998).

A fourth technique I used was that of silence. Van Manen (1997) gives silence a prominent place in both interviewing and writing. Silence is not viewed as the absence of speech or language but as a pause for deep thoughtfulness or reflection (Seidman, 1998; Van Manen, 1997). Silence may be a more tactful way of prompting the other to gather recollections and proceed with a story (Van Manen, p. 68). Speech arises out of silence and returns to silence and creates meaningful spaces. In extending these ideas to writing, instead of committing the sin of overwriting it is sometimes more important to leave things unsaid (Van Manen, p. 113).

The last technique I used was an interview guide (see Appendices B, C, and D). In the in-depth interview guide, the basic structure of the interview is the question that establishes the focus of each interview in the series (Seidman, 1998, p. 76). I developed a guide that encouraged participants' reconstruction of their experiences and exploration of their meaning. Toward this end, I developed prompts or topics under the focus question for the particular interview to facilitate obtaining a fuller description of the experience (McCracken, 1988; Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 1998). These prompts were used as conversation cues if the participant did not touch spontaneously upon them.

Now, I turn to logistics in data collection and recording. All interviews were taped using an audiocassette recorder with a remote microphone for best quality. I kept additional blank tapes and batteries available. I had pencils, pens and note pads available for capturing field notes. I secured the service of a transcriptionist to transcribe the tapes. The contract with the transcriptionist required her to maintain confidentiality of the data,

return all materials to me upon completion, and destroy all files retained on her computer. I retained the only copies of the tapes and transcripts. I compared the transcripts with the tapes to ensure accuracy of information and to review the textual aspects of the interview.

I used the note pad to jot down notes, thoughts, or feelings that occurred during the interviews. I noted items such as facial expressions, nonverbal cues, and questions asked by the participant. I used these notes in concert with my review of transcripts to illuminate feelings associated with phrases or concepts. For management and efficient retrieval, I maintained a log of each interview with notes about each participant.

All documentation remained locked in a file cabinet to which I alone have the key. All tapes were locked in this same file cabinet after transcription. I selected pseudonyms for participants which were used in the text. Their identity will be known only to me.

### Pilot Study

Seidman (1998) strongly suggested using the pilot process to try out some of the practical aspects of the study such as making contact and trying out the questions in the interview. Irvin Seidman (personal communication, February 27, 2000) suggested using a truncated version of the three-interview process. My pilot study consisted of three 30-minute interviews which informed my study in the areas of logistics and process.

One parameter of logistics needing additional attention and planning in my study included the place where the interview would be conducted. Although I had called in advance to secure an interview location, when I arrived the space was occupied for the afternoon. This necessitated finding another interview location while my pilot participant waited. The alternate interview location was very suitable; that is, it was quiet, isolated, well-lit, and contained tables with comfortable chairs.

In preparing for the pilot interview, I wondered if some of the bits of data would be forthcoming in an open-ended question format. Specifically, I wondered if I would obtain details about the individual and her family. As a result of these speculations, I developed a form to take to the interview to secure basic profile information. With prompting, I secured some information that the form captured. Other data that might be helpful in analysis were obtained only on the form. Consequently, I included this form as a part of my data collection process. Although the preferred term is paraeducator, I learned that I needed to use the term appropriate to the context. Since teacher assistant is the term used in this state, I used it in communicating with the participants. Also, I needed to develop more prompts to guide my questioning in the third interview.



## Data Analysis Procedures

In qualitative studies, data collection and analysis typically go hand in hand to build a coherent interpretation of the data (Marshall & Rossman, p. 151). In qualitative research, data analysis begins with the first set of data collection (Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Tesch, 1990). Phases of data analysis in qualitative studies typically include the following: (1) ongoing review of participant narratives, including field notes and reflective notes; (2) feedback from participants; (3) data reduction through coding and thematic development; and (4) development of analytic frameworks to facilitate the search for meaning (Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tesch, 1990).

Working with one data document at a time before comparing across cases seems to be a hallmark of phenomenological analysis . . . and even when phenomenologists summarize each protocol before going on to the next, there still is a lot of comparing done across protocols in order to find these common themes. (Tesch, 1990, p. 93)

In my study, Van Manen's (1997) step three, Hermeneutic Phenomenological Reflection, began the data analysis process. At this point, I illuminated the essences or themes of the phenomenon. Phenomenological research consists of reflectively bringing into nearness that which tends to be obscure (Van Manen, p. 32). To reveal the essence of a phenomenon involved reflectively appropriating, clarifying, and explicating the structure of meaning of the lived experience. In order to uncover the essence of the successful transition from paraeducator to teacher, I conducted a content analysis for emerging themes. Theme development was the tool for explicating the experience. This meant that the theme expressed the notion, was the core of the notion, and functioned as a reduction of the notion. To isolate themes, Van Manen (1997) provided three approaches. I used two of the three approaches, highlighting and detailed reading. In the selective reading/highlighting approach, I looked for statements or phrases that seemed essential or particularly revealing about the experience and then highlighted, circled, or underlined them. In the detailed reading approach, I examined every sentence or sentence cluster to determine what it revealed about the experience. After these preliminary themes were generated, I went back to the interviewee to examine the appropriateness of the themes by checking to see if this was what the experience was really like.

These approaches led me to performing horizontal and vertical analyses of content. In the horizontal analysis, I examined narratives for relationships in the adult life roles of self, self in relation to others (that is, family and community), and self in relation to work. Then, I formed vertical categories within the horizontal categories to form more definitive concepts. For example, within the family category, I sorted further by spouse, mother, children, and other relatives. These groupings became guides for conceptually-focused writing and rewriting.

After isolating thematic statements, I began the writing and rewriting of step four, Hermeneutic Phenomenological Writing. I captured the thematic statements into paragraphs that remained focused on the topic of study. During this reflective writing and rewriting, I used the power of language tone, words, gestures, and silence to intensify the narrative so that it would appeal to the reader and responded to the question at the heart of the inquiry. First, I wrote an anecdotal narrative, the story of the description of what happened. I used the texts generated from the interviews along with the literature review and any consequent readings to reveal the meaningful relations that made this lived experience what it is. The anecdotal narrative, story, was important because it functions as experiential case material on which pedagogic reflection is possible (Van Manen, 1997, pp. 120-121).

The continued data analysis in step five, Maintaining a Strong and Oriented Relation, required that I focus on my research question to provide a critically, reflective description of how the experience happened. In writing an analysis that would be powerful and convincing, I applied the following four conditions that are evaluative criteria for phenomenological writing: texts need to be oriented, strong, rich, and deep (Van Manen, 1997, p. 151). My portrayal of the experience had to be rich and thick in displaying the strongest pedagogic interpretation. Going below the surface to explore and provide rich descriptions provided a dimension of depth that engendered thoughtful, reflective practice.

Continued analysis of participants' experiences in relation to the research question called for working the text for presentation of the essence of the lived experience, the Balancing of the Research Context by Considering Parts and Wholes. Although addressed as the final step, balancing the research context occurred throughout the entire process. I had to be attuned to the dialogic nature between parts and wholes in an effort to grasp and describe the essences. For example, the themes provide an outline upon which to build the anecdotes. Zooming in and out between parts and whole allowed for a more comprehensive vision of the experience in the narrative.

### Quality Control

In addressing quality, traditional standards with criteria were used to ensure a trustworthy endeavor. In addition to these standards, emerging criteria were applied to strengthen the quality of the study. Emerging quality standards centered around concepts such as research should have the following criteria: liberatory potential that enables or promotes justice; respectful relationship with respondents; and practical utility in its specified community (Lincoln, 1995; Marshall, 1990). Allowing persons whose voices have been silent, disengaged, or marginalized as the paraeducators' voices had to provide their own meaning-making is an emerging criterion which added quality to this interpretive or qualitative proposal (Lincoln, 1995; Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Howe and Eisenhardt (1990) stated that standards must be anchored wholly within the process of inquiry (p. 3) and that the success or failure of the inquiry can be judged only relative to the given purposes. Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) assert that in this form, the aim of self-study research is to provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm and settle (p. 20).

Therefore, to determine whether this inquiry is good must be answered in terms of how well it informs or contributes to our understanding of important educational questions.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided the traditional concepts of quality. The concepts of credibility, transferability, and dependability with attendant procedures were used to ensure quality research.

Credibility. The goal of credibility is to demonstrate that the inquiry is conducted in a way to ensure that the subject is accurately identified and described. To demonstrate truth value, I had to show that the reconstructions of the narratives "are credible to the constructors of the original multiple realities" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). In my study I used four of the five techniques recommended by Lincoln and Guba for ensuring credibility: (1) field based activities; (2) peer debriefing; (3) referential adequacy; and (4) member checks.

The field-based activities I used in my study that increased the probability of credibility included prolonged engagement and triangulation. Prolonged engagement in the field included building trust with participants, learning the culture, and checking for misinformation from distortions by the participants and me. Because behaviors take their meaning from their context, it is not possible to understand any phenomenon without reference to the context in which it is embedded (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 302).

Triangulation involved bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point and consists of four different modes. Triangulation may include the use of multiple and different investigators, methods, sources, and theories (Denzin, 1978). Designing a study in which multiple cases, multiple informants, or more than one data-gathering method are used can strengthen the study's usefulness for other settings (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In my study, I addressed data triangulation by using five participants instead of one. Triangulation occurred by combining data from the interviews, biographical profile data, and my field notes. Triangulation in this manner provided thick description of the participants and contexts which are important for explanation and interpretation.

I used peer debriefing or review to provide an external check of my research process. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), this process involves having a critique of the study done by a "disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only

implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). They define the peer debriefer's role as a "devil's advocate" who asks hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations. My peer debriefer was well suited for her role because of her searing analyses, thought-provoking questions, and focus on communicating clearly.

Referential adequacy is the process of checking preliminary findings and interpretations against archived raw data (Lincoln & Guba, 1990, p. 301). I have the verbatim and edited narratives available for review and scrutiny so that analyses and interpretations can be tested for adequacy against the raw data.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider member checks, the process in which the researcher solicits participants' views about the credibility of the findings and interpretations, to be "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). To accomplish this, I took data, analyses, and interpretations back to the participants so they could judge the accuracy of the account. Member checking is both informal and formal, and it occurs continuously (p. 314). I had the participants review the accuracy of the transcripts, agree with initial constructs, and make final additions and clarifications to the transcripts.

Transferability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) purport that transferability is a process in which the researcher lays out the findings in a manner so that other researchers will be able to determine their usefulness in similar situations and with similar research questions or practice. To accomplish this, I described in detail the participants and setting being studied. The extent to which the findings of this study might be applied to other situations or individuals is a function of the similarity between contexts. In addition to contexts, I stated the theoretical parameters guiding my research and showed how data collection and analysis were guided by concepts and models (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Providing these data lead to a rich, thick description which allows the reader to make decisions regarding transferability. Through rich, thick description, I provided detailed information about the contexts, the data, and the participants.

Dependability. Dependability involves determining whether the process of the study is consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 278). Dependability determines the acceptability of the process of inquiry, whereas confirmability determines the quality and acceptability of the findings and interpretation. I used an audit trail to meet these conditions by making and keeping a record of raw data, data reduction and reconstruction, synthesis products and subsequent analysis.

### Data Management and Presentation

To manage the data aimed at explicating the lived experience of this group of paraeducators who made the transition to teachers, I developed a format designed to

capture thoughts (T), feelings (F), and actions (A) across a range of active life roles. I used the same format for each individual across the three sets of interviews, wherein each interview had a specific focus. The active life roles also served as prompts, as needed. Matrices depicting this management are illustrated in Appendices B, C, and D (TFA Analysis).

Developing a strategy for managing the massive amounts of data generated in the transcribed narratives was essential. Efficient retrieval and manipulation of narratives by and across participants was needed for hard copy and electronic production. One strategy I used to facilitate quick retrieval was to number each used line in each session for each participant. The next strategy proved to be critical up through document production for final printing. I assigned each participant a color. This color was used for the paper on which the narratives were printed to begin the content analysis. It was used also for the participants throughout the numerous iterations to get to the final document. These strategies proved to be effective and efficient in managing the narrative data.

Efficient and effective management of data was necessary in order to describe the results of the study. Van Manen's (1997) step six, Balancing the Research Context by Considering Parts and Wholes, provided guidance for the constant interplay between the parts and the whole, or big picture of the research question, which led me into interpretive narration from the generated themes.

In using the analytical approach to present my findings, I engaged critically in an ever-widening search for ground. Since my research involved in-depth conversational interviews, I reworked these interviews into reconstructed life stories. Also, I selected relevant anecdotes from the conversations to provide a compelling picture of the essence of the lived experience.

## CHAPTER IV

### CHARACTERIZING THE TRANSITION

Where you start can be the substance of what you need to get you what you want.  
And I told them, Don't despise the day of small beginnings.

(Angel Williams, Educator)

#### Overview of Findings

Findings in this chapter and the next one provide the answer to the inquiry of this study: What is the lived experience of paraeducators who make the transition to teacher? To fully understand the lived experience of transition from paraeducator (teacher assistant) to teacher, one must view the journey from the two perspectives of how participants characterized it or what happened and the underlying themes or how it happened. In describing the characterization or what happened, I sketch the thoughts, feeling, and actions of what it was like to be a paraeducator who chose to go to college while working full-time. Continuing the journey, I sketch the thoughts, feeling, and actions of what is it like now to be a teacher. Having taken a traditional route to become a professional educator, I needed this detailed picture I paint in this chapter to help me understand the complexities involved in this type of nontraditional journey. Characterizing the journey, having the what picture, is necessary but not sufficient to understanding this type of transition. Consequently, in the next chapter, I delve underneath the stories for the underlying themes that show by what means or to what extent the steps taken shaped the contour of the journey.

In this chapter, I characterize the transition by presenting findings that describe what happened during the participants' journey from paraeducator to professional educator. In the participants' voices, the description shows what the experience was really like as they share stories from their past as a paraeducator (interview one), from their present as a teacher (interview two), and their reflection upon the total journey (interview three). Describing the what events in the paraeducator part of the journey presages the critical events in achieving the dream just as describing the what events in the teacher part of the journey presages the critical events in the new beginning of the teacher.

Three themes emanated from the paraeducator portion of the journey. First, as paraeducators, participants reported attitudes ranging from excitement to disenchantment. Second, they labeled the duties they performed as teacher-without-teacher pay and as the servant in the classroom. Third, as they took actions to achieve their dream, their lives became even more complex as they added the student role to their other life roles.

Four themes in the teacher portion of the journey centered around attitudes toward teaching, ensuring student success, management of learning and behavior, and teacher competence. First, as teachers, participants knew that their disposition toward students and learning was important in orchestrating success. Second, participants set expectations for each student to achieve at his/her highest level. Third, they worked with students, parents, and their assistants to build a classroom learning community that facilitated both high achievement and appropriate behavior. Fourth, participants felt well qualified to manage the learning and behavior necessary to ensure student success. Consequently, they used a variety of measures to assess their competence.

I begin the chapter by explicating my relationship to the participants. This bracketing provides the frame for encasing a common experience in the paraeducators teacher preparation. Next, I detail who made the journey through this common experience. After introducing the participants, I reconstruct their stories of experiences in accomplishing the dream, from paraeducator to teacher. Chronologically, I begin with what it was like to be a paraeducator and end with what it is like to be a teacher with the accompanying thoughts, feelings, and actions in detailing what happened in the transition experience. Analytically, I present the themes that emerged from examining participants stories. Participant themes are interwoven with themes from the research literature.

### Bracketing my Experience

As I begin to illuminate the journey of the paraeducators who made the transition to teacher, I have to situate myself in this experience. My research role as collaborator in the participants reflecting on this journey allows me to frame a portrait in which I explicate the essence of the experience. I had taught part-time in the weekend/evening college program at the public university for several years while working full-time in the public schools in the area. In February 1997, I affiliated full-time with the university as the interim director of teacher education and this affiliation lasted until June 2000. During this period of time, five persons who had been paraeducators completed all requirements to become teachers. All of the participants were enrolled in the teacher education program and matriculated during my affiliation with the university. I was actively engaged with the participants because of having taught them or having directed their program completion through their getting initial teacher licensure. I was engaged actively with the participants through the teacher recruitment/funding efforts of the teacher consortium. I had no affiliation with the participants since they completed their teacher preparation coursework.

Consequently, it was through my involvement as a public school administrator needing to find competent teachers, my development of novice teachers who were nontraditional students, and my soliciting paraeducators to take advantage of funds available for education that I questioned why so few persons were taking this journey. Having taken the traditional trek to become an educator, I could not fathom the route

taken by these persons. Many of my administrator colleagues had taken the same traditional route as I had and could not assist in my understanding of the personal commitment needed to become an educator through the route taken by these paraeducators. So, in this endeavor, I became the tool to evoke the participants' stories about their experiences as paraeducators attending college, about their experiences as teachers, and their reflection on these experiences.

### Who Made the Journey?

The persons who made the journey from paraeducator to professional educator during the time framed in my experience were five African American females. The participants had worked as paraeducators for an average of 7 years and were teaching currently in one of the teacher consortium school districts. The paraeducators had completed the novice phase and were at the end of the apprentice phase as defined by Steffy et al. (2000).

With adding the role of student to their experiences in adult life, participants engaged in greater complexity. Participants felt very good about their accomplishments and were willing to help me with the study but could not see any value in sharing their journey. I don't know what I have or what I can say to help you. Maybe you need to find somebody who can really help you (Angel Williams, Interview 1). Both the student time and the drive time took away from their family time. Who were these minority women who managed this high degree of life complexity? A portrait of each woman follows so we may know who made the journey.

To build a demographic profile of each participant, I needed to know when each one was admitted to the teacher education program. Formal admission was signaled by an admission card or passport granting admittance to upper level courses. For me, the administrator, each time I had issued that card, I had seen it as a procedural formality. I would never think of it in that manner again after seeing and hearing Angel's excitement, even to the point of still carrying the card three years later. Each participant expressed great joy and pride about receiving the admission card.

Angel Williams, my first interviewee, amazed me when I asked when was she admitted to the teacher education program and she got her purse and pulled the card out of her billfold. When I commented that I could not believe she still carried it after all this time, Angel said, "You don't know how much this card meant to me! To be admitted to the teacher education program was just awesome, just awesome!" (Interview 1).

Angel is a woman who has an authoritative voice that is full of happiness. Her voice and her quick mannerisms serve to attract the listener and command easy respect. She had started college when she finished high school. However, at age 18, her social life became more important than academic life. So, during her sophomore year, she stopped



college, got married, and began her family. When she started on this journey to get her teacher licensure, she was 40-years-old and had worked 8 years as a paraeducator. It took her two years to complete the licensure requirements for elementary education and she ended with a 2.8 grade point average despite her social agenda when she first went to college. Angel reported that her husband gave even more time to their youngest son since so much of her time was devoted to getting her teacher licensure. She was the first in her family to earn a college degree. As her commitment to family and finances became paramount, Angel put her dream aside. She said, I stayed home after my oldest son was born. We couldn't make it with one income; so, I worked. I never got a chance to go back to school until after everyone started growing up (Interview 1).

The second participant, Brenda Smith, was a soft-spoken, quiet woman who initially appeared to be shy. Brenda was quietly determined to get answers to her questions no matter how many times she had to meet with you. Brenda, the youngest participant at age 24 when she returned to college, was married with two preschoolers. She had started college in the central part of the state right after high school, attended for two years, and then got married. After she married, she and her husband moved to another state and began their family. Upon moving back home, she decided that she wanted to return to college to finish her degree. She and her husband made challenging family decisions to enable her to accomplish her goal. However, she was torn between leaving her young children and going back to school. She related that being so close to family afforded her the comfort of being able to go to school while persons she trusted cared for her children. She had not tried to go to school while they lived away because she refused to put her children in childcare. She completed her degree for becoming an elementary teacher, her first degree, in 2½ years (with her transfer credits from her previous college experience) with a 3.2 grade point average while working two of those years as a paraeducator. Unlike the other participants, Brenda came from a family of educators. Brenda related that her new role as a student with its long drive to college really played havoc with her commitment to family, especially her very young children. Brenda expressed, It was tough--having two kids. I would fix a nice meal for my family but I wouldn't have time to eat with them. I would stop in Newtown and grab something (Interview 1).

The third participant, Connie Anderson at age 27, was one of the two women who was under 30 years of age when she started. Connie always commanded her listener's attention because she would give another point of view or a challenging insight on the subject or question. She spoke slowly but with certainty in her voice. Connie moved back home at age 19 when her mother became ill after she had started college in Atlanta, Georgia. Connie was married with two preschoolers when she started her journey to become a teacher. When she started to college, her baby was still sick after having been born very ill. She had worked as a paraeducator for 10 years. She earned her degree to become an elementary teacher in four years with a 3.8 grade point average. She was the oldest in her family and the first in her family to earn a college degree. She and a friend

drove 2½ hours one-way every school weekend and incurred hotel expenses for lodging for four years to accomplish the goal. I knew her journey was trying with the family pressures surrounding illness. However, I gained an even greater appreciation of her sacrifice when I drove from the university to her school and home to interview her. Connie related how her new role as a student clashed with childcare needs while she sought to obtain her goal.

Sometimes on the weekend I would not have a babysitter for my kids, 2 years old and one. The professors were very accommodating because they did not turn up their noses when I came in with a baby in a car seat, a pacifier, and bottle for one of my babies. My other one sat in the chair and colored. That made feel comfortable; that by all means necessary, I could come to class and get what I needed, even if it meant bringing my children. (Interview 1)

Denise Jones, the fourth participant, was the oldest at 42 years old when she started to work on her four-year degree for teacher licensure. Denise appeared initially to be a quiet, unassuming person who worked very hard on any task she was given. Denise began to speak with authority in her voice when she told people that she was in college now to obtain a lifelong dream and she knew she was going to make it. She had the longest tenure as a paraeducator at 12 years. She was recently divorced with her daughter in high school and her son just out of high school. Her daughter had opted to live with her father. Denise finished her degree requirements for teacher licensure in special education in four years with a grade point average of 3.4. Denise related that she felt her biggest challenge was that her knowledge from high school had fossilized because she had not been in school for such a long time. Keep in mind I had been out of high school for 24 years when I started. I will never forget I started one day and I had my 42<sup>nd</sup> birthday the next day (Interview 1).

The final participant, Ebony Johnson at age 38, had three years as a paraeducator and did not work under the supervision of a teacher. Ebony had a soothing voice that easily reflected her emotions. Some days she would feel defeated and you could hear it in her voice. Then, she would come back the next day with such strong determination that you knew she would be fine. Interacting with her over time, I wondered if this intensity in quiet emotions would be her demise. Little did I know that this intensity was the core of her strength. Ebony's farm family consisted of her husband and their four children when she started her journey to become an elementary teacher. Ebony already had a bachelors degree in business when she came back to college for teacher licensure. She finished her requirements in three years with a 3.3 grade point average. She was the first in her family to earn a college degree. Her concerns about her family escalated as she entered her student role to become a teacher. She said, I had four children--two teenagers and two very young. So, it was a struggle just getting everything done. I had to find the time to keep up with the older ones without giving them too much responsibility (Interview 1).

## What Was it Like to be a Paraeducator?

Participants in their paraeducator roles related experiences full of actions and emotions leading them to set a goal of becoming a teacher. Themes critical to understanding what it was like to be a paraeducator emerged in the following areas: attitude toward assisting the teacher; participant-identified roles while working as a paraeducator; and acting on the dream of becoming a teacher. They related attitudes toward assisting the teacher ranging from pleasant to unbearable to accepting. They felt unappreciated and identified roles signifying such undervaluing. Participants voiced that they were treated like servants as they did the work of teachers without the pay that teachers received. Such undervaluing of the paraeducators' worth was further exacerbated by seemingly never-ending days beginning and ending with myriad family responsibilities. Latent thoughts of becoming a teacher were activated and participants defied the odds and met the challenges along the path of becoming a teacher.

### Attitude Toward Assisting the Teacher

Examining participants' attitudes toward assisting the teacher was the initial step in understanding what it was like to be a paraeducator because participants' feelings could be a precursor to actions taken. Were participants active and excited or passive and robotic in their role of assisting the teacher? If they were excited when they began as a paraeducator, did this excitement last throughout this job role? Were there changes in the job that led to a change in disposition toward assisting the teacher?

Some participants were excited initially and then became disenchanted while the reverse situation was true for others. The duration of the pleasant early experiences varied as participants encountered travails in their jobs. Ebony and Connie were excited initially. Ebony worked in a tutorial reading computer lab setting without the supervision of a teacher. The principal saw her knowledge of computer applications as the support he needed for a new instructional program for his school. First, she was expected to do the placement tests on students. Then, in her assisting role, she was expected to plan students' instructional course with the teachers and report student results on a regular basis to the teachers. Also, she was expected to share summary class performance reports to the principal. In this new work environment with this new program in the school, Ebony's excitement was short-lived. She said, "In the beginning, I was happy to have a job. After about a month, it was, I don't know if I want to do this because of the pressures" (Ebony Johnson, Interview 1).

Unlike Ebony, Connie, with 10 years of experience, had a longer period of time that she was excited and enjoyed assisting the teacher. Connie's attitude toward assisting the teacher changed when her knowledge of the school culture was used to assist in inducting a traditional-route, new teacher. Connie related this change as follows:

The first teacher that I worked with for five years was wonderful. I was moved from this teacher and the reason that they moved me was the new teacher was fresh out of college and I was experienced-- going into my 6<sup>th</sup> year as a teacher assistant. They moved me so I could help her along. I knew I wanted to go back to college but I don't think I would have done it as drastically as I did, with having a sick baby and financial problems, had I not been moved. (Interview 1)

On the reverse side, Angel and Brenda started with disenchanting experiences in which they felt as if they were automatons who were not expected to think. In this mechanistic role, their attitude toward assisting the teacher was either to succumb to the malaise or to reorient their disposition toward the job. These participants chose to deal with the travails of being a paraeducator by voluntarily reorienting their thinking about the job. In changing her thinking, Angel said, "After my first couple of years as a teacher assistant, I just wanted to quit. But I knew there was more. And then I got under some people that were pretty good and I learned to live with it and enjoy it" (Interview 1).

### Participants Roles as Paraeducators

In the paraeducator role, the two themes of teacher-without-teacher-pay and servant emerged from participants' stories. Pickett (1993) reported similar roles while advocating for a national focus on career advancement for paraeducators. Each participant performed some facet of teacher responsibility but failed to receive the pay or authority and autonomy afforded teachers. Each participant stated that she had to keep reminding herself that she was not in charge in the classroom. Yet, her take-charge manager role was implemented fully in her long days of family life. Performing their jobs in their undervalued role intermingled with demanding family lives led to depictions of feelings and actions signaling changes.

As teacher-without-teacher-pay, the first theme, each participant reported that sometimes she planned lessons, taught lessons, graded students' work, and was responsible for managing student behavior. Ebony was placed in a classroom without teacher supervision and had to interact regularly with teachers to plan student work.

My teacher assistant experience was as if I were the actual teacher. I was not under another teacher for supervision in my position as technology manager. I operated the thirty-computer reading lab. Students from grades 3 through 5 came in and I worked daily with them in the program. (Interview 3)

In this role, Denise felt as if she was the recipient of all the things the teacher did not want to do including teaching when the teacher chose not to teach. She resented the fact that she had to assume teacher responsibilities, including disciplining students, when the teacher was being paid much more than she as a paraeducator. However, having the lower position in the classroom, she had to perform the duties assigned by the teacher.

Denise said, On a number of occasions, I was the teacher. It was like I have this person in here who can do this so I m not going to worry with doing it (Interview 1).

In her setting, Connie felt exasperated because she felt as if she was being used to perform the duties the teacher was getting paid to do but was not doing. Her supervising teacher expected her to do the planning for and grading of her groups. When this teacher was absent, she would not leave lesson plans for the substitute because she expected Connie to be the substitute. When this occurred, the principal sanctioned this switch from teacher assistant to substitute teacher. Having to perform this role, Connie s frustration grew over the two years she worked with this teacher. She related, I got dumped on! By the second year, she complained that I was leaving my job, going back to school, and trying to take over her classroom. I decided I can get paid for this! (Interview 1).

The second theme in paraeducator roles was labeled servant by Denise, Connie, and Ebony while Angel and Brenda described it. Each participant felt unappreciated and undervalued in her support role. Ascertaining any special interests or abilities they had that might enhance the lesson was not a part of the classroom culture. Highlighting this role, Angel said, Teachers treat teacher assistants like they were second-class citizens. I saw it as not being appreciated (Interview 1).

Performing one s job in a mindless manner was the way participants reported that they were expected to act. Each felt she had skills that were not being tapped in the classroom and she longed to be included in some parts of the planning. They were called upon to use their skills regularly outside of the classroom for the school and the school district. Yet, where they spent the majority of their time, that is, working with students, they were expected to be docile and unthinking. Denise lamented, If I had been more into the planning part of it, I would ve felt more like a part of the group instead of just a servant. I think teacher assistants have a lot to offer (Interview 1).

Ebony reported that some teachers reminded her of her lower status when she tried to do her job as assigned by the principal. She managed the computer reading lab and had to schedule teachers classes within t he master schedule. She felt that some teachers resented the fact that they had to engage regularly in planning for students with her, the paraeducator. Ebony recalled being told, Well, you re just an assistant! Who are you to tell me that I have to come at this time? (Interview 1).

### Participants Day as a Paraeducator

Gaining an understanding of what it was like to be a paraeducator requires a bigger picture than just examining attitudes toward assisting the teacher and their job roles. Those two themes relate only to the adult role at work. As Hughes & Graham (1990) showed, adults move fluidly in and out of their life roles. The interaction among the person, the environment, events, and societal demands revealed the complexity of

ways adults address and solve issues in their lives. Two life roles requiring major attention in paraeducators' lives were work and family. Examination of participants' attitudes and roles revealed frustration with the mindless, docile manner in which they were expected to perform. This work relationship, one of the adult life roles, was in stark contrast to their family relationship, another of the adult life roles. Servant functioning at work held no comparison to the executive functioning required of participants in family management. However, unless one looks at a day in the life of a paraeducator, one does not get to see this meaningful contrast of the tension created between being a servant and an executive. Walking through a day with the paraeducators offers the opportunity to see how this tension could signal change.

Days were long, very busy, and fractured among full-time work as a paraeducator, family member, and going to college. Family management for all participants except Denise required coordinating schedules for the many aspects of their children's lives. Participants were committed to spending quality time engaged in play, learning activities, and leisure activities with their families. When participants added the role of adult student, valued family time was usurped.

Depiction of a day revealed the intense intermingling of the adult life roles requiring executive management skills. Although days were harrowing, each participant maintained some components of valued family time. Connie was the only participant who had to drive the bus as a condition of her employment. Other than that, the description of her day was very similar to the other participants who had children living with them. I use Connie's description to help us become immersed in a participant's day. Connie said:

I would get up in the morning at 5:00 a.m. to get the kids to the babysitter and get to my bus by 7:00. Then, I would work as a teacher assistant all day and drive the bus after school. Next, I would pick up my kids, feed them, play with them, have that family time with them, and then put them to bed. After I put them to bed, I would do homework for college from 8:00 p. m. until about 1:00 a. m. every night. I would do that Monday through Thursday. On Friday, when I got up, I would have to have my clothes, supplies, and books packed for college, in the car, and drive the bus to school. I would get off at noon, eat, and get on the road for River City. My husband, mother, or mother-in-law would take care of the kids. Keeping up that schedule, I had gotten really frustrated and sometimes I cried. (Interview 1)

### Acting on the Dream of Becoming a Teacher

Family and paraeducator work obligations were energy consuming. However, keeping the dream of becoming a teacher was a challenge tantamount to both the family and work challenges. Haselkorn & Fideler (1996) purported that for students who are

the first in their family to attend college and reentry adults who have been out of school for a while, the demands of college can be daunting (p. 41). For the participants who had been out of high school for quite some time, the challenges of the coursework paled in comparison to the challenges of the state-mandated national tests required for entry and retention in the teacher education program and for initial state teacher licensure. The seemingly insurmountable challenges coupled with intense feelings lasted throughout preparing to become a teacher.

Three themes emerged when participants took action toward their dream of becoming a teacher. First, participants' schedules lacked breaks during the day and across the span of time they were in college. This concentrated schedule included both advantages and disadvantages. The second theme was the participants' attitude toward achieving the dream. Participants were determined to achieve against all odds. The last theme was the imagined and real test of the dream with standardized measures.

The schedule. Each participant attended classes in the evenings and on weekends. This schedule worked to their advantage because it helped these working women accomplish their mission of becoming teachers while maintaining their jobs. They attended class one or two evenings per week and on Saturday. Data analysis revealed that they kept up this challenging schedule over the period of time they were in college. By the time they reached their last year of college, they reported signs of stress that affected their health. The nonstop weekend college schedule began on Friday night. Angel shared a typical weekend schedule.

Most of my classes were on Friday and Saturday. The courses were set up just right. I'd leave school at 3:30 to get to class by 5:00. I would have class all day long on Saturday. I would get up at 6:00 in the morning to prepare before I left home. I would begin at 8:00 and stay there until 7:00 at night. (Interview 1)

Traditional preservice teachers got the usual summer break from their college coursework. This was not the case for the participants. They kept the same intensity of coursework during the summer as they carried during the regular academic year. As a matter of fact, participants reported that they usually tried to get in even more coursework during the summers because they only had the full-time responsibility of family instead of family and work. Each participant expressed that she wanted to use this time to her advantage to help her finish college as quickly as possible. This non-stop, yearlong schedule was taxing. My last two years, I went to summer school. When I got those breaks from college, sometimes I didn't want to go back. That last year, I got an ulcer. I can't imagine how I finished it (Brenda Smith, Interview 1).

The length of time keeping up this intense schedule varied depending on previous college attendance. Angel and Brenda had the shortest overall schedules because they had coursework from their earlier college experience that was accepted in

completing their program. Another participant went to college for teacher preparation for three years because she already had a business degree that included much of the basic liberal arts coursework. The other two participants attended college for the full four years. Connie shared her thoughts and feelings about giving up her regular life for this journey. That last year was draining simply because I had driven and kept this schedule for four years. I literally gave up my weekends to go to college. As I look back, I ask myself, What was I doing? (Connie Anderson, Interview 1).

Attitude toward achieving the dream. Paraeducators may be returning to college with renewed determination and career focus but they may be intimidated by changes in campus culture, technology, or the natural anxiety of wondering whether they will make the grade (Haselkorn & Fideler, p. 41). Findings in this study revealed that although participants felt unappreciated and undervalued at work, they felt welcomed and respected during their evening and weekend classes. With their renewed determination and the respect they were afforded in college, participants saw college as a setting for them to grow and develop, not just endure as they were at work. They had been out of college for many years. Some of the beginning courses presented challenges, especially as they thought about being in classes with students just coming out of high school. In spite of the gap between high school and college, each participant was determined to excel, to prove to herself that she could accomplish this goal. The challenges and the desire to excel brought forth a flood of emotions. Although they were tired and ill by their last year, their excitement grew as they saw the end of the journey.

Participants appreciated the respect they were given in college. Analysis of the data revealed that their jobs were becoming an ordeal and they felt unappreciated in this role. So, the student role served to repair some of the self-concept that was being torn away. Connie said, I like the respect that the college gave the weekend college students. They saw us as being adults and took into consideration that we were not teenagers coming out of high school (Interview 1).

Participants had two kinds of starts--needing everything for the degree or starting at entry into the teacher education program. The two participants who needed all the coursework to get their degree began with the liberal arts curriculum for the first two years. The other three participants began with upper level coursework allowing entry into the teacher education program. Each starting point was anxiety-laden and presented challenges, the greatest of which was simply beginning the coursework.

Denise, one of the participants who needed all of the coursework to get her college degree, not only had the anxiety and anticipation about just going to the classroom to get started, she also faced coursework that challenged her. With the challenging coursework, emotions flooded her as she continued to think about competing with students who had fresh knowledge of the academic content. Denise related a story showing the emotions, the exasperation, and the solution to her growing doubt.



When I went to college 24 years after high school, it was really a challenge for me. I was on a mission; so, I went at it like there was no tomorrow. I cried many nights. I will never forget algebra and Mr. Materra because he really worked with me. I made a C for that semester but that C was worth a lot to me because I worked so hard to get it. After that first semester, I didn't want to stop for the summer break because I was afraid that I wouldn't go back. So, I went to summer school. I kept reminding myself, You waited 24 years for this. How many people would wait this long to go and then stick with it? ((Interview 1)

On the other hand, participants beginning with junior level coursework could complete the process for entry into the teacher education program. Angel, Brenda, and Ebony reported being filled with anxiety as they assembled program entry documentation and waited for the outcome. At this level, it was not so much the coursework that was the challenge but the intense desire to demonstrate to those who would be making the decision about program entry that these participants had the knowledge, skills, and dispositions worthy of becoming a teacher.

While this student role intensified, other life roles involving family, social activities, and work had to be adjusted. Angel said, I was gung ho about getting good grades. So, I put all that I had in it but I was also determined not to neglect anything else I was doing (Interview 1). When the participant tried to maintain all life roles at the same level she had prior to becoming a student, she paid the consequences in emotional and physical health. I was so fatigued. I remember going into the classroom at work and I started trembling uncontrollably (Angel Williams, Interview 1). An early learning experience for each participant was that she had to make adjustments in her attitude toward her life roles if she was going to achieve the dream.

Testing the dream to teach. Teacher education program standards used standardized testing as one of the criteria for entrance, retention, and exit in preparing to become a teacher. Haselkorn & Fideler (1996) respondents reported 17 barriers to paraeducator career advancement. The second biggest barrier (41%) was basic skills testing required for program entry and the seventh (22%) was testing required for program exit. In this study, the standardized examinations at entry and exit proved to be a challenge that tested most participants' dreams of being a teacher. First, prospective teachers, novices, in the Steffy et al. (2000) continuum, had to demonstrate competence on basic skills for program entry. With success on these measures, prospective teachers were issued an admission card or passport to upper level courses. On the second test (for program retention), they had to demonstrate competence in core knowledge deemed necessary for successful teaching. On the last standardized test, participants had to demonstrate knowledge of the content in the specialty teaching area. None of the participants had difficulty with the test assessing competence in core knowledge deemed necessary for success in teaching, that was required for program retention. Denise had difficulty with some portion of the basic skills entry examinations. Angel and Brenda had

difficulty with some portion of the specialty area examinations, the last tests. Denise said, The most frustrating thing for me was taking those state exams but I never gave up. Then, I got that card that said I was now in the teacher education program. It was a hallelujah day! (Interview 1).

After having passed the tests for entrance and retention, each participant was excited but even more anxious about taking the last set of standardized examinations. They reported that they had done well in their coursework and were receiving positive feedback about their daily performance in student teaching. As positive feedback continued to pour in from the cooperating teacher, university supervisor, other teachers, and the building administrators, each participant's anxiety about performance on the examinations grew. Findings suggest that this anxiety and frustration grew to bigger proportions when the participant had finished her student teaching practicum and was employed as an emergency teacher. Participants could be hired as emergency teachers during the remainder of the year in which they did their student teaching. This gave the participant who needed it extended time to pass the last examination. Angel and Brenda needed additional time. Denise initially thought she did but learned she had met necessary criteria. Brenda related her thoughts, feelings, and actions during this time when she was having difficulty with the specialty area tests required for the initial teaching license.

This one test could keep me from my dream. When I got my scores and I had passed, I just cried. That was the hardest part through all of this--taking the test, waiting for the mail to come, and not knowing what I was going to be doing the next year. I thought about having sacrificed all this time in my life. Yet, without this test, I didn't know where my life was going next. I tried to decide, What else can I do? I had all this pain and uncertainty until I passed this test. (Interview 3)

In summary, themes that emerged when participants acted on their dream of becoming a teacher showed challenges unequalled by both family and work. Their schedules were taxing and they were anxious about having been out of school for so long but they were determined to continue and to excel. Testing was the biggest challenge.

### Reflection on Paraeducator Findings

Participants envisioned themselves on a mission to become teachers and assailed all odds to make the change from paraeducator to teacher. Serving as teacher-without-teacher-pay, being unappreciated as paraeducators, having neverending days split among family, job, and college, driving long distances to get to college, and meeting state teacher testing requirements were challenges fraught with a plethora of emotions and actions delineated by the participants. Participants learned that they could not maintain the same level of interactions within life role relationships they had prior to becoming students. By their accounts, the relationship that they sacrificed to maintain the highest

possible level in the others was interactions in the community. The community interaction they kept, but to a lesser degree, was church. Sometimes, they would forgo church for family or studying for college. When challenges came, they would become anxious and frustrated but they would remind themselves that they had a dream of becoming a teacher. Then, these five women would take actions that demonstrated their commitment to their dream.

### What Is It Like To Be a Teacher?

Having completed all state licensure requirements, signed their first contract for employment, and entered into the induction period, these new teachers had begun their professional teaching experience as an apprentice in the second phase of the Steffy et al. (2000) continuum. Participants entered the profession in a culture that demanded that teachers have the dispositions and demonstrate the actions to assure that all children achieve at high levels. In examining what it was like for participants to be a teacher, four themes emerged. The first theme was the participants' attitude toward teaching. Participants had worked hard to achieve this goal and they had positive attitudes about teaching. Some of their experiences as paraeducators made participants committed to and vigilant about ensuring success for all students, the second theme. Participants knew that they were responsible for managing the environment so that students could achieve success, the third theme. In the last theme, teacher competence, participants felt well qualified so they used a variety of ways to assess their effectiveness with their students.

The apprentice phase, spanning the first three years, was the time when new teachers who had not become acculturated usually left the profession. Being actively involved in the decision-making process facilitated the acculturation of teachers to be decision makers and change agents. This growth in empowerment resulted from interacting with all stakeholders in the school environment with a vision focused on high student achievement. During this phase, independent decision making and reflective thinking were keys to professional growth and success. Empowering the apprentice to be the reflective change agent would lead to the right declared by NCATE (2000), every child has a right to a competent, caring, qualified teacher.

#### Attitude Toward Teaching

Teachers need to be excited about their work so they may construct meaningful learning experiences for children. Cruickshank & Haefele (2001) purported that teachers should demonstrate such attributes as clarity and enthusiasm qualities associated with student achievement (p. 29). Shulman, responding to Tell (2001) in a conversation about good teaching, stated that when a teacher does not have an affinity for and deep understanding of her subject, it's hard to imagine how that teacher will help students understand and get excited (p. 6) about the subject. Carter (1977) found that paraeducators who had transitioned to teachers were more likely to have a more positive

attitude toward teaching than a matched sample of traditionally-prepared teachers in a Career Opportunities Program (COP) two-year program evaluation. When participants began talking about their teaching experience, they began with a disposition showing their feelings of joy and excitement with teaching rather than delving into the act of teaching. From the beginning through the end of this three-year period, participants expressed positive attitudes toward teaching. Each participant began her response by expressing a positive sentiment and giving her rationale when answering what is it like to be a teacher.

In this study, data revealed that teaching was exciting because of its rewards, varied roles, student reaction to understanding, and student success. The primary reward was not financial but was related to students gaining an understanding of the subject. Angel said:

Well, it's exuberant! It's exciting! It's very rewarding and it's fulfilling. It's not the money; I enjoy what I'm doing. I find satisfaction in what I'm doing. The rewarding part comes when the students reach a point that they understand what I'm trying to get over to them, that's what causes me to be fulfilled. (Interview 2)

Teaching was exciting because of the many roles in teachers' work. Joy in seeing students learn was equaled by the participant's excitement about their own ongoing learning. Teaching is very exciting but it's a lot of work. You don't just teach; you wear a lot of different hats. I enjoy the children. Even though you're teaching, you still learn a lot every day and every year. (Brenda Smith, Interview 2)

### Ensuring Student Success

Paraeducators who had made the transition and who were in their second year of teaching tended to be more accepting of individual differences among pupils and felt a greater sense of responsibility and accountability for the pupil's progress than a matched sample of traditionally-prepared teachers (Carter, 1977, p. 209-210). Findings in this study suggest similar thoughts, feelings, and actions. Each participant was committed to ensuring success for all students in her charge. To make this happen, two themes emerged consistently across their stories. First, participants expressed dispositions in which they felt responsible and accountable for all student progress on daily classwork and standardized tests regardless of their individual differences and life circumstances. Second, they were committed to building a community in which everyone shared in the goal of high student achievement and personal success.

Dispositions, responsibility, and individual differences. Each participant not only believed she was responsible for all students learning, she demonstrated the belief with individuals and groups. She expressed the impact of the gravity she had on students' lives and the need to expect students to meet high standards. Each one reflected upon some of

the teachers she had worked with as a paraeducator and was determined not to waste a day in the lives of her students.

Each participant saw her work as impacting students for their entire lives. Although they had students for only 180 days, they chose not to measure their responsibility in those terms. They saw the impact they made on students as a choice deserving the full realization of what it meant to be a teacher. Connie expressed this sentiment.

I do take my job seriously. I take a lot of pride in what I'm doing as a teacher because I realize that I could be a good teacher or a bad teacher. If I'm a bad teacher I choose to be a bad teacher and give my children a bad year. If I give them a bad year and I don't step up and take on the responsibility that I am required to do as the teacher, I will fail them at their third grade life. That means that I fail them for that 180 days and their following years. As a teacher assistant, I never looked at it like that. Now, that I am responsible for everything that goes on in that classroom, I take it very seriously. Some of the teachers I worked with as a teacher assistant I don't think came into that realization, that you are affecting children's lives and you need to take that responsibility very seriously. (Interview 3)

Each participant celebrated successes and she felt that celebrating successes should not wait until a particular time, like the end of the year. Celebrations in their learning environments were made meaningful because they were tied to student successes when demonstrated. The success garnering the celebration was shared with classmates and parents. Students' successes in turn made the participant feel successful. Angel said, School had been in session for three weeks and we were ready for a celebration. We celebrate successes along the way. I don't wait for a page; I start celebrating with a paragraph or even a sentence (Interview 2).

Each participant saw individual student differences as the need to differentiate instruction instead of lamenting the fact that students were not performing at rates that were close together in that grade level. Analysis of data revealed that participants differentiated for learning in both academics and behavior. They conferred with students in both formal and informal situations to assess their thinking. They sought their students' thinking, especially about behavior, throughout the day. Participants reported that they saw differences as the need to look below the surface of disruptive behavior and to engage students in examining their own behaviors. Brenda shared thoughts about helping a student examine her behavior to change it.

I think a lot of times before we get on these kids and say they're not doing what we ask them to do or they're not being respectful, we have to help them learn how to think about behavior (Interview 3). I had a young lady in fifth grade who had

been a bully the year before in fourth grade. So, I wondered how she would be this year. She lived very close to school but she had missed a lot of days; her mother had never come to school. When I got this child, I talked with her regularly. I gave her my phone number and told her she could call me. She would call me often. She ended up being very respectful and actually asked me to adopt her. (Interview 2)

The respect and acceptance of individual differences afforded participants students extended to their families and the students communities. In their communities, participants reported that parents of students needing a great deal of help either with academics or behavior would not come to school. Each participant saw it as her responsibility to reach out to these parents to engage them in their child s learning. Each took the responsibility of engaging parents in her learning community just as seriously as she did engaging students. Many times these homes were uninviting but the participant felt she had to go the extra limit to visit with the parents in their homes.

Building a sense of community. Each participant used many resources to ensure that students attained success. A primary resource for each of them was a paraeducator. Participants enlisted their paraeducator in the total operation of the classroom. In this study, data revealed that they conferred with their assistants about special interests that might be used to enhance learning and they engaged them in student learning activities. Each participant made sure that her students treated the paraeducators with the same respect afforded them. From the participant-and-paraeducator teaming, a culture of high expectations coupled with caring led to a strong sense of community in the classroom.

Sweet (1977) reported that a paraprofessional can be a threat to a first-year teacher and a experienced paraprofessional can be threat to any teacher new to the building (p. 123). In this study, most participants worked with paraeducators who had a great deal of experience in assisting teachers and in the same school. This experience in assisting and knowledge of the culture presented a challenge for participants as new teachers. Each participant began teaching in a school different than the one in which she had been a paraeducator. So, at the beginning of her teaching career, she had to learn procedures, practices, and people that were new to her but not to her assistant. This gap initially caused the participant some uneasiness. However, she focused on the fact that all adults in the building were there to help children learn.

Ebony s experience with a paraeducator was different than all the other participants because she had functioned alone in her classroom for three years. She did not work under the direct supervision of a teacher. So, with her paraeducator, she had no previous experience upon which to build. She knew they needed to work as a team and they had to trust each other in order for it to show to their students. Talking about this experience discrepancy and trust building, Ebony said, Having my teacher assistant was frightening because she had been here many years. Being new, I wondered how good a

teacher I would be and with her experience would she think I was good. But we've worked well together (Interview 2).

In this study, participants reported that they saw skills and abilities in their paraeducators that they did not have. Each participant capitalized on those attributes to build more ownership in the learning community. Constant communication about students' needs and paraeducators' skills in helping to meet those needs created a comfortable environment focused on learning. Brenda thought back to her experience as a paraeducator and how her first teacher would not talk to her for days. She also thought about how this teacher failed to show her respect and insist on it from the students. So, in building her learning community, communication and respect between adults was necessary and had to be modeled for their students. Brenda said, "Being able to just talk with her is important. I always try to get her input because she might think of something that I don't. She is very creative, very artistic" (Interview 2).

### Management of Learning and Behavior

Like COP-prepared teachers, participants took responsibility and were accountable for managing the learning and behavior for students in their classes. Carter (1977) reported that second-year COP-teachers who had been paraeducators showed the following: (1) capacity to interpret information effectively to obtain student understanding; (2) attitudes toward students that demanded appropriate behavior; (3) competence in obtaining the cooperation of students; and (4) consistency in using disciplinary approaches. Findings in this study were similar to Carter's (1977) findings. Data analysis revealed that each participant seemed to start out knowing the value of consistent disciplinary procedures in creating a climate for success. She set up conditions that motivated students and she enlisted parent support in this success for all climate.

Each participant fostered classroom environments that engaged students actively in the learning community. Just as she taught the academic content, she taught students to feel good about themselves as learners. She set high expectations and worked with students to achieve them. Angel said, "The phrase, 'all students can learn,' I'm in that corner now. They say students have changed but I believe they have not changed in one way. Every student wants to feel good about his/her work and wants to succeed" (Interview 3).

In addition to helping students feel good about themselves, each participant reported that students needed to experience positive role models. They saw themselves in this role. Their students came from a variety of home settings; however, many of their students came from troubled homes. With this backdrop, each participant felt that as a role model, she needed to help students learn about trust relationships. Participants encouraged daily, open communication with their students in order to help them learn how trust in a relationship works. Denise stated, "My students know if they're right, I'll

go to bat for them but not if they're wrong. Sometimes, we're the only concerned adult figure some students can talk to or come to for guidance. We're their role models (Interview 2).

Each participant pulled in reluctant parents to help in creating environments where students saw the important adults in their lives working together for them. Participants refused to accept it when they were told that none of the student's previous teachers had been able to get the parent to come to school conferences. They saw these situations as challenges necessitating other means, such as going to the home to have the conference. Enlisting parental support sometimes required taking a bold stand. Each participant saw this taking a bold stand as a risk that came with the responsibility of being a teacher.

Connie took a bold stand when she challenged an inebriated mother to help her help her child become a successful student. This student had had a series of disruptive behavior episodes--running from teachers, stabbing at children with pencils, barking and howling--since kindergarten and teachers had dismissed him as a learner. Connie shared Ricky's success story.

Teachers from previous years called him Rocking Ricky. I checked his behavior record and saw that he had been suspended very frequently. I pulled up his Accelerated Reader tests and saw he was on preprimer level and he'd only read two books (he was now in third grade). That's when I really got angry. So, I started him on books at his level. At open house, his mother, walked up to me, introduced herself, and I smelled alcohol on her breath. After the other parents left, I told her, Ms. Hunt, I don't mean to be ugly and I'm not only going on what people have told me but Ricky has not been at his best. But I'm telling you, this year Ricky will learn and I expect your support at home. You cannot give me the support I need to teach Ricky when you're drinking. So, you need to help me help your child and put that bottle down. I was brave but she was receptive. The first day of school, Ricky tried to rock but I started him on his books. He read 55 books in a month and a half. His mother always came to school for parent conferences or any other time I asked her to come. So, I get tickled every time I think about this story. (Interview 2)

Each participant reported designing and applying disciplinary procedures in a consistent manner. They designed and used procedures that were easily understood and that created very little disruption to academic instruction. They shared the procedures early in the school year with both students and parents.



## Teacher Competence

Participants felt well qualified so they used a variety of ways to assess their effectiveness with their students. Yet, how did their characterizations of competence fare in relationship to other teachers who made the transition from paraeducators?

Ascertaining teacher competence of previous-paraeducator teachers necessitated looking back to the Career Opportunities Program evaluation. Carter (1977) found that when previous-paraeducator teachers were compared to a matched sample of first-year traditionally-prepared teachers, they were (1) more likely to have a more positive attitude toward teaching, (2) more original in thought, and (3) more supportive of student-initiated talk and less likely to ask questions eliciting rote responses. Also, they (4) receive a higher rating from the principal based on their work in the classroom, (5) have students with a more positive self-concept, and (6) have parents with more positive attitudes toward school. Participant self-reports in this study tended to suggest some similar findings.

Each participant felt empowered to produce high student achievement. This feeling of self efficacy showed in three themes. First, participants engaged in ongoing self assessment. They continuously assessed student needs and reflected critically upon the decisions they made. Second, not only did they learn from their colleagues, they also served as a model for their colleagues. The less-experienced to more-experienced learning was difficult sometimes for participants because their colleagues were not willing to accept their ideas. The third theme that showed teacher competence was the administrator assessment. Principals saw their excitement and effectiveness in both their learning and their students learning and they used these attributes to enhance school goals.

Self assessment. In assessing themselves, each participant told about innovative lessons she created that helped her students obtain challenging concepts. She sought and used approaches to reach the wide variety of learning styles and reflected upon both the learner and the process. Both students and parents recognized and acknowledged her skills and abilities in teaching. Her self-evaluations focused on becoming a better teacher.

Each participant reported designing at least one lesson that caught the attention of her colleagues and administrators. They used many hands-on materials and integrated concepts. They reported that student evaluations showed a high rate of attainment and mastery. In turn, students expressed satisfaction with their teachers lessons. Denise's students had learning difficulties that to her meant that she had to find their most effective learning style and design lessons that accommodated their style. Her story about her science lesson was indicative of the creativity used to get students excited about learning.

I did an authentic task with my science students. We had been studying the rock cycle and we focused particularly on sedimentary layers. They had the opportunity to make edible sedimentary layers. I brought in fixings for sandwiches: bologna; turkey; ham; two types of cheese; tomatoes; pickles; also, peanut butter and jelly. They made sandwiches using the different types of bread. Also, I made desserts that were in layers such as banana pudding and punch bowl cake. With this lesson, they got to eat what they fixed. They really enjoyed that lesson. At first I thought, they're not going to get this but they were able to tell me all about the rock cycle in the lesson review that day. Every student responded without hesitation. It's the satisfaction in doing something like that and seeing students get it that really make me glad I'm a teacher and want to continue to teach. (Interview 2)

Participants' reports about themselves as teacher-learner showed that they sought both formal and informal professional development opportunities but they were committed to using every day as the most efficient learning opportunity. They saw a need to be continuous learners. Denise said, "I'm not perfect in the least bit; I'm constantly learning. I'm constantly asking questions" (Interview 2). One of the main strategies participants used to help them learn about their students engaged in learning was reflective teaching. They thought back about all aspects of the lesson as they monitored students creating meaning. Connie said, "I think I've probably gotten better over the years because I'm constantly thinking back over whatever I'm doing. Did I do that wrong? Should I have done that differently? What should I have done? I analyze myself critically" (Interview 3).

Model for colleagues. Participants influenced and were influenced by colleagues. They attempted to influence colleagues directly. However, if the direct approach failed, participants used an indirect approach and modeled strategies. In their schools, participants basically found two kinds of colleagues: those who were willing to learn from them and those who were not willing to learn from them. Colleagues who were receptive and anxious to learn about the new theories and strategies they were bringing with them from their college experience believed they could learn from anyone. Colleagues who were not receptive fell into one of two categories. They were closed to learning new strategies and techniques or they felt there was a pecking order and new teachers must wait until it was their turn to be in the spotlight. Some participants experienced teachers who were closed to learning new strategies and techniques were very close to retirement. They found that teachers in the pecking-order category were ones who felt their years of experience gave them much greater wisdom in all aspects of teaching and they had to use this wisdom to influence the new teachers' way of thinking and acting.

One of the colleagues available to provide an appropriate model for new teachers was a paid mentor. Even with this paid mentor, some participants tended to find a

willing, unpaid colleague who also provided guiding support. Many times, the unpaid mentor was an older teacher who trusted the new teacher to help her in learning to use new materials and strategies. For example, Brenda had a paid mentor but she found a willing, unpaid mentor in her aunt who was a teacher in her school. Brenda sought guidance from her aunt about matters of discipline and interacting with parents. This teacher with her numerous years of experience also sought support and guidance from Brenda, the new teacher. Brenda guided this experienced teacher in learning new techniques and supported her through her trying out the new learning. She said, Now that I m a teacher, sometimes my aunt calls me to help her. With running records, she ll ask me, Am I doing this right? (Interview 2).

Some experienced teachers felt that new teachers needed to stay in their place in the pecking order and learn from those who had been on the front line of teaching. Nevertheless, when participants were not allowed in group settings to lead in areas where they had cutting edge knowledge and skills, they used other opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge. Angel s depiction of pecking-order teachers follows:

Sometimes when teachers go to workshops and learn they have to change, they get an attitude. Then, they re intimidated by the person who already knows. As a new teacher, I had already been exposed to some of those new ways because I got it at the university and I came prepared, especially in technology. ( Interview 3)

Administrator assessment. Principals used classroom observations as the primary tool to form judgments for evaluations. They also used data about participants interactions with students, parents, colleagues, and other administrators. Each participant reported that her principal was pleased with her instructional and behavior management skills but they were especially pleased with behavior management skills. Data analysis revealed that principals capitalized on participants fluid mix of instruction, behavior management, and esteem-building by having other teachers observe the participants. Administrators supported and encouraged teacher development that was aimed at ensuring student success.

The data in this study suggest that most participants used instructional and behavioral management techniques that were valued by their principals. Most participants reported receiving high ratings in management skills. Denise recalled a highlight involving her classroom management skills being observed by an initially licensed teacher (a teacher in the first three years). Denise said, I ve had one of the assistant principals--now, she has her own school--to send other initially licensed teachers to observe me. She likes the way I discipline with respect (Interview 2).

Analysis of data revealed that as new teachers, participants received support from education personnel ranging from mentors (teachers with training in clinical supervision designed to facilitate new teacher development in the first three years) to the

superintendent. Observations from these positions coalesced with observations from other teachers, parents, and students with formal observations by the principal to form evaluations. After conferring with a parent and then directing her to the principal and superintendent, Ebony wondered how this might impact her summative evaluation. Ebony shared the outcome of her final evaluation, On my end of year summative, I got one four and the rest were threes (on a scale from one to four). My management skill was a four (Interview 3).

### Reflection on Findings

Participants described what the experience was really like as they shared stories from the past as a paraeducator, the present as a teacher, and their reflection upon the total journey. I connected with the participants during their novice or teacher preparation period and this provided the frame for a common experience for the portrait painted in the reconstructed narratives. Participants set a goal of becoming a teacher and took the necessary actions regarding family, work as a paraeducator, coursework, and licensure to achieve that goal. Many intense emotions accompanied this phase of the journey.

Participants had completed their first three years of teaching and they were still as excited about becoming a teacher as they were when they started. They focused on meeting student needs and in engaging parent support in this endeavor. Their interactions with colleagues focused on helping all students be successful in school. Their communication and their discipline techniques maintained student dignity and they were rewarded by students, parents, and administrators. Participant teachers designed creative lessons to engage students in the learning process. They engaged in ongoing critical questioning of their performance in helping students to achieve at high levels. Participants felt responsible for and accountable to students; so, they taught students how to learn the content. When behavior or health interfered with students learning, participants interceded so that students would not be excluded from the learning community. Administrators acknowledged their quality teaching in ratings on evaluations, in having participants model strategies for other teachers, and in structuring grade level teaching to match their demonstrated abilities. Participants exemplified the competent, caring, qualified teacher expected by the NCATE (2000) vision.

## CHAPTER V

### THEMES UNDERLYING THE TRANSITION

If I can see it,                      If I can see it, then I can do it. If I just believe it, there s no  
There are miracles in life I must achieve. But first I know, it starts inside of me.

(R. Kelly, Musician)

#### Overview

In the previous chapter, I characterized the transition by presenting a description of what happened during the participants' journey from paraeducator to professional educator. In this chapter, I continue with the participants' stories in their voices to present the themes underlying the transition that describe how the transition occurred. In detailing how the transition happened, I go below the surface of what happened to examine by what means or to what extent the steps taken shaped the contour of the journey. The following questions might help to understand the difference between what and how. Did changing Connie from the teacher with whom she had worked for five years to assist a new teacher influence her in any way? What impact did Denise's feeling like a servant have on her? Did Brenda's decisions about childcare influence her school decisions? Where did Ebony get her desire to uplift the underdog? Why would Angel go out of her way to assist a student who had been suspended? These questions show thoughts, feelings, and actions but providing answers to questions like these explicates the degree to which there was or was not an impact. In this way, I show the essence of making the transition from paraeducator to professional educator through the voice of the five minority women who made the journey.

In detailing how participants made the journey, I present findings through critical events that punctuate changes in tandem with transitions, the psychological processes, participants went through to handle old and new situations. In the first theme, achieving their dream, findings showed that participants had a propelling experience that was a defining action that started them on their way. They had hardships that were bolstered by essential supports. The second theme that emerged was the new beginning. After enduring the propelling experience and managing the hardships with supports, participants reached their new beginning. Themes uncovered in the new beginning were ambivalent feelings, personal changes from paraeducator to professional educator, and administrators throughout the journey. In this new beginning, filled with ambivalent feelings, participants came to see themselves in the new role they had envisioned. Participants used their personal power to transform themselves and others. Their personal power was necessary but not sufficient to overcome the challenges in the new beginning. Their stories revealed that personal power in concert with administrator support gave them their new beginning.

## Achieving the Dream

Changing from the assisting position to the lead position took the participants through numerous endings and beginnings full of chaos. While they were asserting themselves to advance, they were besieged with a wide variety of thoughts and feelings that led them to take actions that fractured who they were at the time they were paraeducators. This fracturing occurred in relationship to self, family (parent and spouse), friends, and work. Setting the goal of becoming a teacher and seeing themselves become a teacher kept participants focused on this mission.

In beginning their dream, these five minority women had a defining experience that propelled them to take action. While pursuing the dream, participants encountered at least one person who mentored them through this part of the life journey. Participants gravitated toward persons who had similar goals and found these individuals were able to help them deal with the fractured lives they were leading. The last class, the clinical experience, and the last tests for initial teacher licensure coalesced to cause physical distress which tested the mettle of the participants.

### Propelling Experience

Each participant had a defining experience that started her on her transition. This experience propelled her into taking the action of going to college to become a teacher. According to Bridges (1991), every transition must begin with an ending and endings are a precondition to self-renewal. Bridges also points out that many transitions begin with being disenchanted rather than disengaging first. This was the path of the participants. They became disenchanted with their jobs as paraeducators but they could not physically or emotionally disengage from them until they had obtained their new competencies. While three of the participants had work experiences that propelled them, the other two did not. Their experiences involved going to school or a personal life event.

The propelling experience is particular to each participant so we become engaged in each paraeducator's story. In the previous chapter, we learned the personal profile information about each participant. While this information is essential, it fails to enlighten us about the impact of the critical events during the journey.

Going-to-school experiences Ebony's story. Unlike the other participants, Ebony had a series of experiences from elementary school through college that drove her to make a change. With each of these events, she became disenchanted. She did not become disoriented because the events were encased in a natural time frame, for example, a year or a semester. With this externally-controlled calendar, disengagement was a natural occurrence. In this process of endings or letting go, Ebony experienced the emotions expected with loss, those of anger, anxiety, sadness, and feeling down.

Ebony was a first generation college graduate when she obtained her two-year associates degree and then her four-year degree in business administration. She started at the community college and had to take remedial courses initially because she lacked essential basic skills. As Ebony experienced success with each goal, her confidence in herself grew and she tried to attain a higher level. After getting a job as a paraeducator, she went back to school again to obtain the necessary competencies to become a teacher.

Ebony s most profound propelling experience in her personal transition happened at fifth grade. This fifth grade experience was the one that caused her to really consider teaching many years later. After encouraging her, Ebony s principal brought her financial assistance information for going back to school for teacher licensure. As she considered teacher licensure, she pondered why she would want to go back to school. Her fifth grade experience surfaced and influenced her then and throughout her teaching career.

If I am going to pursue teaching, I need to figure out why I want to do it. I looked at my reasons for doing so and the one thought that popped in my mind was that fifth grade experience. I decided that I never wanted a child to feel as if they were nobody because they weren t among the elite or the bright kids as I was made to feel in that class. That teacher hurt me. I was walking by and witnessed her and another teacher quarreling over the fact that she omits certain kids in the classroom and she said point blank, I don t want to teach these kids! She felt she had none of the so called bright kids; she either had the low, slow, or the average kid--which at that time I was probably. No one would have known what I was capable of doing because I was so quiet, had low self-esteem, and very little motivation. I had the ability but I wasn t challenged to do my work. After that, I wouldn t even raise my hand if I knew because I felt she didn t want to know what I knew, so why make the effort? (Interview 1)

Ebony s pain upon hearing her teacher s castigation caused her to spend some of her class time between daydreaming for escape and considering whether to do her work. She wondered why she should try when she was put with a teacher who did not want to work with her. Ebony s thinking led her to decide what she wanted, which helped her get through the remainder of the school year.

I felt, Well, if she doesn t want me in her class, I don t want to be in here. She doesn t care. So, there was nothing she could do or say to get me to pay attention. She doesn t want to teach me. I m just in here because they put me in here. I m in here and I will do my work because that s what I need to do. I thought, I d like to see her face when she marked that 100 up there because she had to give me what was due. Then she had to hand my paper back to me and I had the same 100 that the bright ones sitting up in the front had. (Interview 3)

Ebony had other school painful going-to-school experiences but none was as profound as her fifth grade experience. For example, an accounting professor told her at the beginning of his class that she did not need to be in his class because she would never learn how to do the work. She stayed, did the work, and made an A on his final exam. He asked her how she did it and she told him, I made it through your class because you told me I couldn't. I meant I was going to get out with that A (Interview 3). Ebony's disenchantment was not with her job but with a series of teachers who had hurt her over her going-to-school life. To get past the hurt caused by teachers, Ebony had to garner a way of thinking about the hurts that would not lead to self destruction. In each instance, she turned the hurt around to drive her to perform at a higher level as her following reflection showed:

I believe that without those experiences, I wouldn't feel the way I do about teaching or how I interact with other people. It gives me a better understanding of how things you say affect a person. So, it makes me mindful of what I say and do because I don't want anyone to feel the way I felt. No one deserves to feel hurt, sad, angry, or disillusioned. (Interview 3)

Bridges (1991) second phase, the neutral zone, is the period when a new sense of self grows and inner reorientation occurs. The thought that guides this phase is, How do I structure and employ strategies to negotiate this chaos between the known (past) and the unknown (future)? Both as a youth and an adult, Ebony experienced the hurt and the pain in letting go of these episodes. To reorient herself to continue toward future goals, she set a challenge to achieve the maximum rating. She refused to accept the negative comments as obstacles. Instead, she used them as opportunities to demonstrate her strong determination and more intense personal resolve to achieve. Ebony's personal growth path of enduring and letting go of the painful episodes and building a stronger determination to achieve each subsequent goal led her to dream of going to college.

Somewhere in the recesses of my mind I had always wanted a degree. Teachers had low expectations for me and I was poor. In high school, no one advised me about my desire to go to college. I had fairly good grades but I had this feeling of being low average. I finally got to college because I kept saying I wanted to go and my husband pushed me. Once I entered college, I found out that I really could think. Also, I realized there were even more obstacles that were going to affect how you make it through life but you have to work for what you want and set a goal. Then, you have to want to achieve the goal. (Interview 1)

Personal experience Denise's story. Whereas Ebony's change derived from her going-to-school experiences, Denise's change, her ending or letting go, came from her personal life involving her divorce. Although she knew she would experience major changes in her family role, that is, no longer a wife and mother of children who would be living apart from her, Denise saw this change as essential in her life journey. Denise's



disenchantment in her marriage led to her severing the marriage bond, disengagement. That is, she separated from her familiar place in the social order of marriage. She lost part of her self-definition, wife, or the way she had been labeled for many years. She sought to lessen the emotions associated with loss by embarking on her personal mission, getting a college degree, with a vengeance.

Rather than just talk about how you want things to be better, you have to try to make things better. It's not just going to happen. Like with my marriage, I was married 22 years and I was stuck. No one wants to see their marriage end but you don't need to stay there in all that abuse. Sometimes the emotional abuse is worse than the physical abuse. You know you need to change your situation. It's just like going to school or making things better in your life. You've got to want it and then you've got to do something about obtaining it. You can't sit there and constantly complain about it. So, I got a divorce. My ex-husband was still trying to be a part of my life; so, I had to deal with all of that stress. I had so many medical problems. I decided I had to do something to make things better in my life. (Interview 1)

In Denise's neutral zone, the period when she was reorienting herself to a vastly different future, she began her exploration of options by toying with the idea of college. She loved her job but this goal kept surfacing in her thoughts. She wondered if she were crazy for wanting to go to college; she wondered if she could manage her family situation. In developing her new sense of self, she reassessed her standing in life and determined that she wanted more. Rather than using her mental energy for coping with her failed marriage, she used her energy to plan a way to approach her long-held goal. Out of the chaos of this period in her life, she began to see herself accepting the challenge of going to college.

I had been toying for awhile with the idea of going to college. At the time, I had been a teacher assistant since 1985. It had been 24 years since I got out of high school but I knew I had not accomplished a goal of going to college. So, I filled out the paperwork, was accepted, and a new life began. College was going to be a challenge but I was going with a purpose; I was on a mission. I didn't know how I was going to do it but I knew I had to do it before I would say, "Okay, this is crazy; I'm not going to do it." I knew I wanted to do this because I had my goal, I wanted a college degree (Interview 1).

Paraeducator work stories. The other participants had an episode that drove them to make a change. Just like Ebony, they became disenchanted. They did not become disoriented because the events were encased in a natural time frame with the externally-controlled calendar. This presented an opportunity for a natural disengagement but the participants took action and made a verbal request to effect disengagement. In this

process of endings or letting go, participants experienced the variety of grief emotions, sadness, anger, anxiety, and feeling down or depressed.

Angel and Connie were first-generation college graduates. Brenda came from a family of educators her grandfather had been a college professor and her grandmother had been a teacher. For each participant, obtaining the card or passport to be admitted into the teacher education program was a major milestone. To each participant, this meant she was well on her way to becoming a teacher even though this was the first step in the novice phase. At this juncture in the journey, they could see themselves obtaining the necessary competencies to become a teacher.

The propelling experience for these paraeducators happened at work with a particular teacher. The experience was so profound that it remained vivid in their minds, as they related stories about their lived experiences as a paraeducator and as a teacher. The propelling experience influenced them throughout their lives. I begin this section with Connie's experience because she was the participant who introduced the concept resulting from the painful experience as propelling.

The second teacher I worked with really propelled me forward. I'm going back to school! There is absolutely no way I'm going to continue to work as a teacher assistant and get dumped on. This first year teacher depended on me to do planning for a group of children. Then, on top of doing my job and her job, she would go in the teachers lounge and talk about me. I got frustrated. I couldn't take it and I asked to be moved for that final year that I was a teacher assistant. Honestly, my experience with that one teacher made me take the drastic measures that I did--sign up for school with a five month old sick baby being fed through a feeding tube. It really propelled me forward to get the degree because I was doing the job. So, I was going to get the pay for it. (Interview 1)

Angel had worked with some good teachers over her years as a paraeducator who had encouraged her to get her teacher licensure. They told her she was very good with the students, she cared about them, and she pushed them to do more than anyone thought they could. While working in these good experiences did not move her, Angel related what caused her to make a move.

What really convinced me was when I worked under one teacher for several years that was a horrible experience. I thought, You can either get bitter or get better. So, I decided to do something about it. I went to my principal first and said, If you don't move me next year I'm quitting. I told him I was being mistreated and being treated unfairly. The next year I wasn't in that situation but I was in another situation with a young, first-year teacher who I felt didn't know how to discipline the students. She was inexperienced but she knew how to treat me. One night in my bed, I was pondering some things she had said. I think my greatest fear of

going back to college was that I would fail. After meditating, I decided that I was going back to college. (Interview 1)

Brenda, with two years, had the shortest tenure as a paraeducator. However, even in that short time, she had a bad assisting experience that verified for her that she had made the correct decision to go back to school.

My first year, I had a bad experience. I was with a teacher who did not appreciate that I was going to school. There was one day a week that I left 30 minutes before school ended and that did not satisfy her. It was a first grade classroom and I really enjoyed that age group but the teacher wanted the room to be completely hers. She did not want me to have any part of the room and the kids felt that. That made it very hard for me to control them because they looked to her as the teacher and I was just there. On the day I had to leave to go to school, she treated me coldly. When I would come back after being out sick, she wouldn't talk to me for a few days. I had never experienced anything like that; so, it was really hard. I could never imagine treating someone else like that. (Interview 1)

These three participants experienced the hurt and the pain in letting go of these episodes so they could endure until the end of this particular time frame. The time frame was the year in which they were working with the teacher who caused them the pain. Their neutral zone quandary centered on when and how to make the change to go to college. Embarking on this journey would change many long-held relationships and open up a vastly different future full of unknowns. Nevertheless, each participant had a goal of achieving her teacher licensure so she used her energy to explore the possibilities toward this end. In developing the new sense of self, each participant developed a plan to attain her long-held goal. Rather than using her mental energy for coping with the bad work situation, she used her energy to plan and she began to see herself accepting the challenge of going to college.

### Hardships and Supports

Participants negotiating the challenge of college to become teachers encountered hurdles or hardships unrelated to their academic performance. The programmatic hurdles of the 1970s COP (Carter, 1977) were the same ones reported in the 1990s Class Ceiling (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996) and were the same ones encountered by participants. Financial, social, community, and specific academic hardships presented challenges requiring participants to make both physical and emotional changes or adjustments, transitions. Just as these areas presented hardships in the journey, participants turned them into challenges they could meet. Participants refused to see any area solely as a hardship. As they began to see themselves coming into being the whole person in their vision, they appropriated resources from persons who would support them.

Financial hardships. In both the 1970s COP and the 1990s Class Ceiling programs, the major hurdle for paraeducators to overcome in achieving their dream of becoming a teacher was financial. Participants in this study mirrored the concern voiced in the 1990s Class Ceiling programs, the inability to give up even meager salaries because they were needed for family life. This hurdle presented a dilemma for participants to explore and resolve while they were in their neutral zone phase. To enhance the chance of their success, they needed to develop strategies on how they were going to make ends meet financially while they were in college. Connie shared that, as a paraeducator, she was getting that little measly \$800.00 (Interview 1) per month. Then, as a result of her propelling experience, she quit her job. So, she no longer had that amount coming in for family existence. Instead of being depressed and defeated by their propelling experiences, each participant developed plans on ways to scale back or to meet financial obligations.

Each participant sought and used financial assistance from a variety of sources. Sometimes they would start with one funding source but it would expire before the student teaching semester when participants would have to take leave from their jobs. They learned about the financial support offered by the teacher consortium which came into play for their student teaching semester. For persons working in consortium school districts, they could take a consortium-sponsored course and they only had to pay \$40.00. The consortium paid the remainder of the cost of the course and paid for textbooks. The consortium also paid \$500.00 per month while persons were engaged in their student teaching (Murphy, 1997). Angel talked about looking for financial assistance.

I went back to Thorpe University looking for monies, investigating any place that would help. I got the Ford Foundation Grant while I was there but still didn't have enough money to finish my last semester. I found out about the teacher consortium one day when my principal said, he had something that might interest me. He said, I have a scholarship you might be interested in, the teacher consortium. It's not quite a scholarship but it will help you if you need some money. At the university, I learned that the consortium would help me if I went back to school. (Interview 1)

In conjunction with grants, some participants used loans to help pay their college expenses. Because of the hardship posed by their student teaching semester when they would not have their teacher assistant salaries, they looked ahead and made decisions to lessen the financial hardship for their family. Brenda explored many options.

When I went back to school, I applied for financial aid. My grant took care of my tuition for fall and spring but I had to take out loans for summer school. Preston County joined the consortium just before I did my student teaching. Some fliers came out from the teacher consortium that gave information about how teacher assistants could get help to become teachers. I called the director who told me

even though I was finishing up, they would give me a \$500.00 a month stipend while I did my student teaching. This was wonderful because at the time I was putting in for my leave and I didn't expect to get anything. My husband and I had saved some money because we knew I would have to stop working. At that time, we were scared because leaving during the year meant I wouldn't get paid for the summer. Times were hard; we had to figure out what to do. My family had land in the country. So, we surveyed an acre of land behind my mom at the beginning of my second year as a teacher assistant. We decided to move out of Preston Garden apartments and buy a single-wide mobile home. The payments on the single-wide home were much more reasonable than our rent. I was closer to my family which was a plus for help with my children. I got a stipend from the consortium for three months which was very beneficial for my family and me. (Interview 1)

Participants' complex lives included the gamut of expected and unexpected financial obligations incurred in living. Whenever medical expenses were incurred, this added a huge burden to already stretched budgets accommodating participants' college needs. Connie had heavy financial obligations resulting from the several surgeries needed by her baby. So, she needed her salary as an assistant and as a bus driver to help her family. She also had the additional expense of motel lodging every weekend she went to college. Therefore, Connie used financial assistance from all sources to help with college.

There were fliers given to us, teacher assistants, in our mailboxes about the teacher consortium. The #1 thing that drew me in was the financial part where I would only have to pay \$40.00 to take a class. Money was a real stressor for me with having to have the extra \$60.00 it took every weekend to go to college. Money was tight, which is why I tried to hang in there and drive the bus. (Interview 1)

In the teacher consortium region, once top administrators learned of this opportunity, they led the effort to inform paraeducators about opportunities for them to get financial assistance. Superintendents showed their support for paraeducators to attend college while they worked. Denise saw both of these things as what she needed to help her make the change to make her life better. Financial support was essential as Denise had to start housekeeping on her own.

The superintendent called all the teacher assistants to a meeting to discuss a new program. He had the weekend-evening college director there and they talked to us about how we could go to college and maintain our job. So, I filled out the paperwork, was accepted, and began a new life. Money was very tight for me but I knew I had to make a change. I think it was probably the money part that kept me from going before. I couldn't afford to go. Being able to go with the Ford scholarship was wonderful but that assistance ended. Our school system became a member of the consortium after I started going to college and I got help from

them until I finished student teaching. I needed help because I had recently left a house where I didn't have to pay all the bills and started on my own. (Interview 1)

In this agricultural part of the state, small farm families needed assistance whenever a member went to college. Many times, the head of household had to secure other employment to sustain the family. Such was the case for Ebony. Primarily a farming family, Ebony's family needed financial assistance to help with college expenses. Her husband urged her to go to school and just use whatever financial help she could get. He assured her that the family could make it. Ebony took advantage of opportunities offered.

The principal gave me this packet and said, "This is an opportunity for you to pursue your certification with the teacher assistant scholarship. I thought about it for a while and talked to my husband about it and he said, 'Go ahead.' I got the assurance from him that we could make it. At the time, the county I live in had just become a part of the teacher consortium. I was already in the teacher education program; so, I went to the director and she explained the program to me. I could take advantage of the financial resources being able to have most of our expenses paid. That was a big help to my family. I got help from the teacher consortium during the latter part of my experience because I was just about to finish the program. So, I received one semester of assistance but it was needed at the time because I had to take leave from my job to do my student teaching. (Interview 1)

Family obligations. Kaplan (1977) and Haselkorn & Fidler (1996) reported that the paraeducators aspiring to be teachers led the three distinct lives of full-time work in the schools, a crushing academic load, and being mothers. Because of the all-encompassing nature of these roles, the domestic life seemed inevitably to be the first to be neglected. In order to lessen the impact of the neglect of family, extraordinary dexterity and dedication was needed to accomplish their goals.

One of the primary social relationships was the paraeducator participant with her family. Regardless of whether her children were preschool to elementary age or high school age and older, paraeducators felt torn among maintaining her family and home, her job, and her college work. Hardships in family obligations were most pronounced for the three paraeducators who had young children. The intense intertwining that resulted in this fractured self required short-term and long-term adjustments if participants were going to meet the challenge of going to college to achieve their goal. The quickness and ability to adjust were related to the kind and amount of support participants received from family members. As we listen to participants' stories, we learn how they met this challenge. The first three stories--Brenda, Connie, and Ebony--demonstrate the hardships and supports in families with very young children. The last two stories involve the teenage children.

Childcare was one of the major issues facing participants when they decided to add going to college to their busy lives. Their salaries were a hindrance to securing the quality of childcare they insisted upon for their children. Further, they simply did not like the adult-to-child ratio they found in many childcare centers. So, immediate family members became the childcare providers for participants so they could work and go to college with peace of mind. With her husband supporting her going to college and sharing household duties, including childcare, Brenda's mother eased her mind about quality childcare.

I went back to school and it was tough with having two kids. I had not gone back to school before moving back home because without my family, I would have never been able to do it. I do not like to keep my children in daycare. At the time I was trying to finish school, my daughter was 6 months old and my son was 2½. It was tough because I felt like I took time away from my children for those 2½ years I went to college. That was a sacrifice that my spouse and I talked about. So, he was there for the children when I was not there. Having that support benefitted me. I could not have gone back to school and finished if I had not had my mother there knowing that my children felt comfortable with her. My spouse was supportive. He saw what I wanted and stood behind me 100%. (Interview 1)

A longer drive to college necessitated a more demanding need for childcare because the participants were away from home for longer periods of time. A longer drive to college also necessitated reliable transportation which meant using the family's primary vehicle and sometimes the only vehicle. With a long drive and Friday night classes ending late and Saturday classes beginning early, additional money was needed for lodging. This was a drain on an already meager family income. In addition to transportation woes, any type of medical problem further exacerbated family life. Facing seemingly impossible family hardships with all of these issues, Connie persevered as she related below:

When I started college, I had a 5 month old baby and a 2 year old. My 5 month old born in September, had four major surgeries through November and a fifth surgery when he was 18 months old. He came home in November and I took off work to stay home with him. Two weeks after I went back to work in January was when I signed up to go to college. Leaving him was really tough for me even though I left him only in the care of my husband, mother, or mother-in-law. It was so tough to go away and spend the night but I would call from school and check on him a lot (Interview 1). I could not have gone to college and gotten my degree had it not been for the support of my family. I realize that there is nothing more important than those who supported me: my sisters keeping my children; my mother-in-law keeping my children and cooking during the week so I could get papers done; my sister-in-law taking the kids to the movies while I stayed home and did homework. This support was tremendous! I respect them because they did

not have to do it but they had respect for me and for what I was trying to do. So, they did everything they could to help me. (Interview 3)

In this study, data revealed that family members were eager to support participants by providing childcare. Participants' families were not able financially to provide help; so, taking care of participants' children was a tangible way of pushing them toward their goal. In addition to taking care of the children, families also did whatever they could to take care of the participants themselves. So, whenever this major support disappeared, it caused agony for participants and a need to find a replacement for that supporter. During participants' going to college part of the journey, this only happened once but it was substantial. One component of Ebony's support vanished when both her parents died and were no longer available to assist with the children. Her grief, childcare woes, and job challenges combined with college work to create tremendous pressure as Ebony exclaimed

I'm not going back tomorrow! I'm just not going to do it! My husband understood the pressure I was under and would say, "Okay kids, it's not such a good night for mom. Then he'd just drive and we'd talk until he felt I had a grip on things. I had lost both parents but he never once asked me to stay home with the children. Relatives played a big part there. I had a dear cousin to come in and help with the babysitting and watch the children after school in the event that he wasn't at home. I had at least one babysitter to take care of the youngest free of charge. That was a godsend because daycare would've been a problem for me. Then, my cousin would call and say, "I cooked dinner for you tonight; stop by and pick it up. That was a big help for me. (Interview 1)

Sometimes children in the family would complain about what they were missing because the participant was going to college. When this happened, fathers would help the children understand that this current sacrifice would be beneficial to them for the rest of their lives. For the four participants with spouses, they reported unlimited support came from their husbands when they relinquished some of their family household responsibilities. These spouses switched readily to the nontraditional household roles of childcare and meal preparation while encouraging participants to go on and not worry. Angel reluctantly accepted the fact that her family had to make sacrifices in order for her to attain her goal.

My husband was always there 100% to back me up and I'm thankful because he helped me with the kids. He was there for me when anything negative was thrown at me from the children (Interview 2). He made sure that the two younger boys had what they needed. If I ran late and couldn't do something, he'd do it. He would say, "You go ahead and I'll do what I need to do here. He was absolutely wonderful through the whole thing. He was the hand on my shoulder when I felt like giving up. My mother would help in any way. She'd say, "You're going to



make it. I know that I wouldn't have made it had it not been for those two people in my life. (Interview 1)

A host of family members provided support for participants because they were inspired by helping participants realize a dream. To lessen the hardships participants were encountering, this host of family members provided support ranging from childcare to car care free of charge. For the participant who did not have to worry about childcare, the worry of establishing a household for an individual surfaced. Adding the student role to the complexity of establishing a new household added more stress to a life already challenged by physical and emotional health needs. Needing to maintain a routine schedule to reduce stress but failing to do so, Denise's family provided a variety of support.

Many a night I got home from school and my sister or my mother would have left my dinner on the table because I kept telling them I was too tired to fix anything to eat. So, I would just eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches which I knew was not good for me, especially my diabetes. My sister said, "Don't worry about cooking; we will feed you." And they did that the entire time I was in college. My mother knew the struggles I had gone through in my personal life and she encouraged me and did everything she could. I don't know who was happier, my mother or me, because I was her first child to attend a four-year college. I had so many obstacles but things worked out because I had my family support. I called my daughter, "Help me with this algebra!" My uncle would work on my 1973 car and he said, "I'm going to keep this car going as long as you go to school." So, he kept my car serviced; he didn't charge me anything. (Interview 1)

Colleagues, friends, paraeducators, and teachers. Haselkorn and Fideler (1996) reported that a small number of the Class Ceiling programs indicated resistance to paraeducators becoming teachers as one of the barriers to career advancement. Community members (friends), peers, and teachers were reported to be obstacles to paraeducator transition to teacher. So, some community members said things to try to pull the paraeducator into her place, the traditional wife and mother role.

Each participant experienced the hardship of having friends, other paraeducators, and teachers try to dissuade, either directly or indirectly, them from attaining their dream of becoming a teacher. Some of their peers and teachers at the school put the participants down by reminding them of their status in the organization, just an assistant. The just an assistant refrain hurt participants as it reminded them of their servant status and that they were not seen as potential teachers. As they got into their senior-level courses, they indicated a desire to learn more from their current teacher and to do more teacher-like functions with students in the classroom. Many times their outreach was rebuffed and they were made aware again that they were not considered likely candidates for teaching.

If I had been more into the planning part of it, I would've felt more like a part of the group. I wish they had involved me in the actual lesson and maybe allowed me to go to more of the meetings. I let them know that this was what I was learning and that this was what I might be doing the rest of my life. I could've gotten a better idea of what was actually going on. (Denise Jones, Interview 1)

Peers envious of the participants' schooling and visible changes made confrontational statements to try to discourage continuation toward the goal of becoming a teacher. Each participant used a variety of strategies to avoid the confrontational statements meant to hurt her. Angel rejected the age obstacle that was thrown at her.

There were people who saw me go after this who said, "You're going to college as old as you are. I was just 40 but some people felt it was too late. It's never too late. There were people in my classes that were much older than I. So, it changed me emotionally." (Interview 1)

Each participant experienced a bevy of changing attitudes that were meant to discourage them. Participants surmised that you really find out who your friends are on this type of journey. Sometimes, friends would decide that participants were too busy and would exclude them from extracurricular activities in which participants wanted to continue to participate. For example, Denise had worked for years with a fellow paraeducator as co-coordinator for Special Olympics. Experiencing changes in her colleagues' attitudes as she got closer to getting her college degree, Denise said

People get jealous if they feel like you're trying to better yourself. People that gave me encouragement to go on began to act a little standoffish the further I got in school and the closer I got to graduation. I had said, "If you're having a meeting or a special activity, just tell me in advance and I'll try to work around it." They would say, "We knew you wouldn't be able to go. I wish they had let me make the decision on what I wanted to do. I began to feel like I was contagious; people were moving away from me. They thought they were doing me a favor but I felt like they were deserting me at my time that I needed them most." (Interview 1)

To lessen the discouragement they were encountering, participants tried to use a variety of strategies. One of the early strategies each participant used was to try to conceal the fact that she was going to college. I tried to hide that I was back in school in the program to become a teacher from my colleagues but the word got out. (Angel Williams, Interview 1).

In the face of this discouragement, each participant sought beneficial strategies. Needing to bolster their self-concept and determination to continue, one of the main strategies participants used to help negotiate the course of this journey was seeking out

and finding positive people wherever they could find them. They found support in persons with situations similar to theirs--working as paraeducators and going to college.

There was the group that wanted to better themselves. So, I found myself becoming closer to them because my friends that were not going to school or did not continue their education started acting different towards me. I met friends that were in school. We all had that same objective and we'd get together. Most of us were assistants in the school systems. We were trying to finish our goal. That was helpful because sometimes when you'd get stressed out, there was somebody else going through the same stress you were going through. Those people that were going to school with me were a big support for me. (Brenda Smith, Interview 3)

Participants found support in persons with whom they discussed their work-college-life options. Angel also reported finding positive support from friends of family members.

Talking with professors, administrators, peers and discussing and weighing out options about what to do next, I experienced lots of success. Each little success nudged me on and caused me to keep going forward. There were a lot of people around me who encouraged me. My husband's friend who owns a sporting goods store said, "You'll get it; just keep chopping at it." (Angel Williams, Interview 3)

Some teachers presented a hardship while others provided support. Sometimes, the supervising teacher supported and then withdrew support as the participant neared her goal. Denise related the type of hardship and support she received from teachers.

When I started going to college, I was working with a teacher who was really a pusher in the beginning. If she didn't have something for me to do, she would say, "Ms. Jones, do you have any homework? I want you to get to that homework." She was very good at doing that in the beginning. Things started to change towards the end. I would ask if there was something that she needed me to do and I would tell her why. She would say, "No problem, go on." Just as soon as I would pull out my book, all of a sudden there was something for me to do. This happened on several occasions. (Denise Jones, Interview 1)

While the supervising teacher's support fluctuated, other teachers provided support in the form of materials and services throughout participants' preparation for teaching.

I would go to some of the teachers at school for help. I'd say, "Okay, help me with this subject." I probably would have given up if the teachers there had not been that strong support system for me. I remember several times Mr. Lewis, the mechanic at school, would look at my car. He would say, "Do this and you'll make it to school." I would make it to class and back home. (Denise Jones, Interview 1)

College. In the paraeducator's journey, the college experience was essential and pivotal in fulfilling her dream. Each participant began this part of her journey with little self-confidence which fed her uncertainty about how she would perform. Their major hardship was that they had been out of school for so long that they felt they might have trouble relearning what they had forgotten or learning all the new material. Nevertheless, they decided that once they got into college, they would do whatever it took to succeed. They did not know what or how but they felt that working in the setting for which they were being prepared had to have some advantages.

The college teacher education program experience began the novice phase in career teaching. This phase began when preservice teacher candidates begin their first field-based experience and ended with the student teaching experience (Steffy et al., 2000). In the life cycle, this phase bridged the chasm between knowledge and practice. Novice teachers took a variety of sequenced courses designed to help them acquire the skills necessary to function effectively in the classroom. The preservice teacher candidates' glimpse into the real world of teachers' work viewed against the lens of theory from their college classes occurred in field-based observations where they got opportunities to see how professional teachers created and managed the learning environment.

Filled with doubts and anxieties, each participant began their college experience. They were full of doubt about how they would perform in their classwork after having been out of school so long but the participants used their fortitude to meet and conquer the challenges posed by college. Reflecting this beginning doubt, Angel said:

I started going back to school with very little confidence knowing that there would be quite a few challenges. But as the journey began to grow and as I began to move further towards my goal, I started gaining more confidence and self-esteem. I think that's the way things are. You may be apprehensive about something when you start out, then experience little successes along the way; they boost your confidence to keep going. That's what it was with me. (Interview 3)

In the college teacher education program experience, participants had an advantage over the traditional preservice teacher candidates because along with the contrived field-based experiences, they were immersed daily in the real world of teachers' work. With all those years working in classrooms, the paraeducators' work could be viewed as an extended form of clinical experience (Haselkorn & Fidler, 1996). With this daily living experience in the projected work environment, participants got to see how professional teachers--good and bad--created and managed the learning environment. Each participant felt this extended experience time was very beneficial to their in-class performance and suggested this as a strategy for anyone considering going into teaching.

Having been a teacher assistant, I would suggest that anyone who goes into the teaching field spend some time--more than one hour--in the classroom setting. Do it for a month or two and just observe what goes on in the life of a teacher. Then decide if that is something you want to do because it's not easy. You really want to decide if this is the choice you want to make. If teaching is a goal, you've got to be committed. Go to the class, observe, listen, and interact with the children because it's not a profession to take lightly. (Ebony Johnson, Interview 1)

Haselkom & Fideler (1996) reported that paraeducators who had been out of school for many years prior to returning for teacher preparation met the GPA requirements for college admission and performed as well as traditional students in the preparatory coursework. Carter's (1977) matched sample of first-year COP-prepared and non-COP teachers at 15 sites across the country showed that the COP participants performed as well as the non-COPs when grades were used as the measure. This picture was no different for participants. Angel said, "I was excited because I was getting the grades I wanted from my classes. With my other grades, I had a 2.3 but in my major I finished with 3.78. I was just gung ho about getting good grades" (Interview 1).

Two of the participants who had been out of high school a long time, experienced academic difficulty with the liberal arts portion of attaining their degree. One started at the community college and had to take a remedial course to catch up and the other had difficulty with a course in her first semester of college. Even though they started with doubts about being able to keep up, they set their goal as getting the top grade. They worked very hard and were adamant about getting the best grade. Ebony's thoughts, feelings, and actions about getting her first letter grade that did not fit the part of the goal she had mapped for herself follow:

I'm very fierce about grades. I started out and had to go back and take the remedial classes because I had worked so long and forgotten a lot. When I got admitted, my first semester I got a straight 4.0 GPA. I was 30-years-old when I got the first C and I bawled like a baby. I just couldn't see myself just getting that C. That was devastating for me; I cried for two days. I had set that goal that I never wanted a C but I mellowed as time went by. (Interview 1)

Participants had to meet the same teacher education program admission criteria as all other candidates. One criterion was having a 2.5 GPA in their coursework through the end of sophomore status or associates degree, if transferring from a community college. Once they met all criteria, they were issued a status card or passport indicating official acceptance in the teacher education program. Another criterion for admission was having spent 25 hours observing in classrooms of one's selected major. This early field experience, designed to ensure candidates got to see what real classrooms were like, was waived for participants.

Even if preservice teacher candidates engaged in numerous early field-based experiences, they had to wait until they were immersed in student teaching to really get to see if there was a tension between the theory provided in the college classroom and the reality provided in the real classroom with its variety of students. (Steffy et al., 2000). This was not the case for participants who could go back to school the next day and apply the theory to the reality. This kind of direct application of theory was one of those experiences that participants had felt must be available but could not name when they began.

It was wonderful when I got into the special education courses and we talked about situations and scenarios. Different things would come up that we would study in class and then I could go back to school the next day and apply it. Or either, I could think about situations and say, Okay, this was done different than how we talked about it in class. I was able to see the difference and know that this is going to work but that is not going to work. (Denise Jones, Interview 1)

Each participant enjoyed the success she had in her upper level courses. These courses were more like the actual teaching they were experiencing in the classrooms on their jobs. As they observed their teachers plan and present lessons, they were having to do the same in their college classes. Participants reported that they felt at ease when they did microteaching in their college classes because they were instructing groups of students in their work. This was another one of those direct application of theory experiences that participants had felt must be available but could not name when they began. Connie shared her thoughts about planning and teaching lessons in her college classes.

The courses I enjoyed the most were the actual hands-on teaching parts: math; social studies; and reading. We had to do lesson plans, projects, make things to go with our lessons, and then present them in class. That was the most helpful part that carries over to where I am now. We had all those lesson plans that we could bring into our profession and classroom. Being a teacher assistant helped because it was not my first time getting up in front of other people, children, or the teacher. It really made the transition easier to be a teacher assistant and then be in college and asked to teach a lesson because you had already been in the class. You already knew how a classroom was supposed to run. (Interview 1)

As important as grades were to each participant, they were not the only indicator of success in their teacher education courses. Each participant felt they had well-planned lessons. They knew they would be critiqued by both their professor and their classmates. They reported that the peer review caused them anxiety because they were not used to criterion-based reviews. In their college classes, they were learning how to use standards to develop criteria for judging performance. Participants experienced success when they received their peer reviews. Angel got excited as she related her story about peer reviews.

I experienced lots of success, even with a methods class that people told me was going to take 90% of my time. I knew I was in it for the long haul, heading towards the end of my courses, and I was determined to do whatever I had to do. One of the first things I had to do was teach a lesson. That was something we were going to be doing frequently. So, I decided to just go ahead and do it. When I finished the lesson, the students stood up and applauded. That really edged me on. I thought, You've done this; you know you can do the rest. (Interview 3)

One area in which all participants except Ebony felt threatened by the knowledge and ease of use traditional college students possessed was in the area of technology. As they were in the process of being admitted to the teacher education program, participants learned that prospective teachers were expected to have been proficient in using technology in their specialty teaching area. They observed their professors use various forms of new technologies and participants were expected to use it in their microteaching and with their students when they began teaching. They knew they had to meet the program standard but they felt trepidation at their paltry beginning knowledge and use as related by Angel.

I did not want to take the technology class but I knew that technology was the wave of the future. As a teacher assistant, I had been exposed to a small bit of technology. I will never forget one night when I went to my Foundations class, we had to go into the computer lab. I knew absolutely zilch; I think I knew how to turn it on. The professor said, Don't be afraid. Learn to master it and not let it master you. She worked with us and then told us, Come back to the lab and do this assignment. I went back to the lab that following week and to my surprise pulled up the page where I was supposed to be. I couldn't believe I had done it right; so, I was really excited. Since then, that piece of technology became the greatest resource for me. So, that was one of my greatest successes. (Interview 3)

The student teaching or internship portion of each participant's teacher preparation presented hardships for her. Hardships were not failure to meet program competencies but were ones resulting from the intense intertwining of women's life roles. One major hardship was having to come off the payroll and lose the benefits afforded full-time employees. Deteriorating health proved to be a hardship at this ending point of the journey. Another hardship for some participants was arranging the internship closer to their home so they could spend the time needed to do the planning for student success. The regular period for student teaching was 12 continuous weeks. However, for persons who had worked as a paraeducator for three continuous years out of the last five years, they could apply for a six-week internship. This meant that all participants except Brenda qualified for the abbreviated experience; she had been a paraeducator for only two years. Performance during this abbreviated experience determined whether or not the internship had to be extended.

Not having salary and benefits for 12 weeks was a major burden for each participant. So, they started exploring all options as they approached student teaching. One option explored was finding a way to shorten this length of time without salary and benefits. Angel's thinking and action follow:

When they told me I was going to have to stop for 6 weeks from my regular job, I thought about the monies. I thought, I'm going to miss a whole month and a half of pay. How am I going to do this? I said, I've got to let them know that I've been a teacher assistant for 9 years. Surely this will have some weight. They modified my student teaching and I had to do 6 weeks instead of 12. That was very good compared to what I was going to have to do at first. Then, the teacher consortium helped with money while I did my student teaching. (Interview 1)

Not having salary and benefits for 6 weeks coupled with having to move and set up housekeeping away from home was a great burden for Connie. Having driven to the campus 2½ hours one-way every class weekend for four years, Connie decided she would explore doing student teaching at home and having someone drive to her once each week for five weeks. So, exploring this option, Connie's thinking and action follow:

Getting student teaching set up was a big obstacle. I asked to do my student teaching at home in Montgomery. That was an obstacle that Thorpe University made very easy. I was pregnant and I remember worrying a lot about whether or not I would be given this allowance. Also, they allowed my teacher assistant experience to count. Since I had been a teacher assistant for 8 years, I had to do only 6 of the 12 weeks of student teaching. My student teaching experience was awesome. It gave me a chance to be with the kids and be the teacher who was accountable for something for a short period of time. (Interview 1)

Bridges (1991) and Newman (1995) assert that transition is such a stressful process and people must work to maintain their physical health. This working to maintain good health is brought about because the person willingly goes through the pain and vulnerability of uncertainty involved throughout transition. Participants chose a path that would get them to their dream. The college experience was crucial to obtaining their goal on the way to their dream. Now, at the end of their course of study and very close to obtaining the goal, each participant had dealt with a great deal of pain, anxiety, and ambiguities throughout this journey. Analysis of data revealed that most participants constant juggling and flux in their intermingling life roles involving family, friends, work, college, and self coalesced resulting in health problems which created even greater stress. Adding to the health problems she had already, Denise said, My last year I broke a bone in my ankle and I was on crutches but I didn't let that hold me back either (Interview 1). Detailing some of the stressors that came together to make her ill toward the end, Brenda said, That last year was getting to be too much. I was diagnosed with an



ulcer. Not working was a big stressor. Doing my observations, classes, and not knowing if I'd be selected to do my student teaching were stressors. (Interview 1)

One of the supports that emerged from all but one of the participants' stories was what I termed, the life mentor. This tended to be a person with whom the participant connected in her early college entry or re-entry. The life mentor was not necessarily the participant's advisor. The life mentor was someone with whom the participant felt she could share some of her turmoil and travails, get guidance on things other than course scheduling, and get coaching and encouragement during rough times. The life mentor tended to have a lifelong impact on the participants, including influencing how they worked with students and colleagues, today.

The life mentor's influence began early in the participant's college entry or re-entry and participants felt comfortable going to talk to this person. Participants had been out of high school for a long time and some of them had not been counseled about options of going to college. One participant who had received no counseling regarding college, began her higher education at the community college and then transferred to the four-year institution. Her life mentor emerged at the community college with her initial college entry but a similar picture unfolds with participants who re-entered college. To begin understanding the life mentor, I start with Ebony's depiction.

She's dead but I think of her often as someone who was a gift for a person with low self-esteem, the way I felt when I first started to school. She gave me that added push and I really appreciated her for doing that. My initial goal wasn't to go into education. I was going to go for two years, get an office degree, and work as a secretary. She said, "No you're not stopping there. You're going to do something else." And from that point on, she got me to join clubs, become an officer in clubs, and participate in state competitions. (Interview 1)

Participants with a life mentor consulted them for guidance on many issues. They found this mentor to be someone with whom they could unload their emotional turmoil and not receive sanctions or be belittled. At one point when Denise was upset and crying, she said, "I'm too old. I'm not going to continue to do this. I'm just out of here!" (Interview 1). Early in the term in Angel's first class one evening, she exclaimed, "I don't think I can do this; people say so many things that hurt!" (Interview 1). In second guessing her decision, Brenda lamented, "Maybe this isn't for me. Maybe I need to be thinking about a different role." (Interview 3).

Participants talked with this mentor about other people's perceptions of them, just quitting college and staying in their current positions, struggling with coursework, difficulty with testing, and jobs. They valued the fact that the life mentor would listen and seemed to understand their turmoil.

The professor listened. I told her that some family members and friends were talking about the way I was changing my talking, that I wasn't taking care of my family, and the way I was acting different. She listened, talked with me, and invited me to come again if I had other concerns. (Angel Williams, Interview 1)

Sometimes this mentor would direct the participant to ensure follow-through. Ebony said, She played a major part in my transferring to Thorpe University. She said, You have the qualifications to go. You will go. She gave me the paperwork to complete (Interview 1). While directing her to opportunities that would facilitate her college progression, Brenda's life mentor would call and say, There's a job open at this school. You need to apply (Interview 1). Sometimes this mentor provided indirect guidance. Angel recalled that she was led to an answer when her life mentor posed a series of questions for her to consider.

The participants with a life mentor went to them to get encouragement and coaching during rough times. They felt that their life mentor had lots to offer and did not mind sharing with them, no matter how many times participants sought their help throughout their struggles. The life mentor continued to say, Keep on going. You know there is a light at the end of the tunnel; you know it's there (Denise Jones, Interview 1). When Brenda experienced difficulty with the standardized examinations required throughout preparing to teach, the life mentor encouraged and coached her. When I did not pass my test the first time, he was the one who encouraged me and gave me suggestions about taking it (Brenda Smith, Interview 1). Sometimes participants needed coaching on relationships outside of college to help them learn to develop strategies for persevering. Toward this end, Angel's life mentor said, If they're not paying for anything in your life, they don't have a say in how you talk, act, or dress. Listen to what your immediate family is saying and the kind of support they're giving you (Interview 1).

The life mentor not only gave participants guidance on a wide variety of issues, this person tended to have a lifelong impact on the participants. This impact extended to influencing how they worked with students and interacted with colleagues. Participants tended to try pull everything they could out of students to get them to do their best. This strategy coupled with determination was an impact from the life mentor. Ebony said:

That's why I try to give my students that added push. I don't feel as if I would have really gone as far as I did if it had not been for her saying, You can do this. I didn't want to let her down because she saw something in me that I didn't think I had. Seeing her as a teacher influenced my decision to get certified. (Interview 1)

Each participant shared life lessons they learned from their life mentor with their students. They continually told their students not to give up when things were hard. Also,

they gave back to some of their colleagues the guidance provided them by their life mentor. Brenda learned of a colleague who was struggling and said, I have a friend going through that same thing, trying to pass her test after being out of school for over 15 years. I gave that advice to her that he gave me (Brenda Smith, Interview 1).

### Reflection on Findings

Achieving the dream was accomplished by setting and seeing the goal and going after the goal with passion and vengeance. Their drive exemplified Bridges (1991) position that one's guide through the change is a vision of the future; that one must see beyond this particular period of transition. Participants experienced changes through their propelling experiences of going to school from elementary through college, divorce, and working as paraeducators. Other major changes involving finances, family obligations, colleagues, and college resulted in both hardships and supports.

Hardships for first-generation college aspirants planning to become teachers have not changed over this 30 year time span. Financial hardships coupled with family obligations seemed insurmountable until participants used their fortitude to prevail. Participants used their neutral zone time to figure out how to lessen financial impact upon their families. When colleagues tried to disparage participants in order to keep them from achieving their dreams, participants became proactive and sought relief from persons who provided them with positive comments and other forms of support.

College, the linking element in the dream, presented hardships unthinkable to participants. Although participants had planned for college, their lack of self-esteem led them to question whether they would be able to compete with younger, traditional college students. When participants had academic difficulty, it tended to be within their first year of college. Admission to the teacher education program--the beginning of junior level status--was seen as a major celebration point for participants. They began to be able to see themselves on the road to becoming a teacher. They actually saw themselves as teachers during the times when they were teaching lessons they had prepared and presented to their peers and during student teaching. Student teaching was another major milestone on the road to becoming a teacher because it put them in the setting in which they were working already. However, at this point, they were in an elevated status, the role of the teacher.

In tandem with the changes came the transitions, the psychological processes participants went through to come to terms with both the old and the new situations. Propelling experiences hurt but they were changed into opportunities by participants. These propelling experiences closed or ended some social relationships but they opened doors to other relationships that participants used in interacting with their students and colleagues across their novice and apprentice phases. Participants refused to see only

hardships. They garnered their fortitude and enlisted supports to help them throughout this journey.

### The New Beginning

The new beginning may be gradual rather than a sudden realization but one day the person realizes that she has stopped getting ready and has begun to identify with the final result of the new beginning (Bridges, 1991). Each participant began to realize her new beginnings during her last two semesters which were filled with methods courses and student teaching. They knew they still would encounter hardships but they began to see themselves as teachers as they actually taught lessons they had prepared that were critiqued by their peers and professors. In student teaching, they felt like teachers and they really saw themselves as teachers as they were supported while they did all the things real teachers did in schools. Participants knew they were very close and they anxiously anticipated their new roles at work. They were excited about teaching methods and student teaching as Connie shared.

It was exciting when we actually got to the teaching methods. Then, I really enjoyed my student teaching. We had fun in the social studies and science blocks. We did a lot of science experiments. The teacher I worked with in the science and social studies block was so excited because she said I brought that youth back into her--she had worked for 22 years--because I came in with all the hands-on stuff and science experiments and the kids really had a good time. (Interview 1)

According to Bridges (1991), the new beginning--the last of three phases in his theory of personal development--involved an inner alignment, not an external alignment, that was signaled by a renewal of energy. This renewal of energy marked the rebirth into a new direction or a new way of life. Bridges (1991) said that everyone has trouble with new beginnings because anxieties and confusion result from fear that real change destroys the old ways in which one previously established security. Ambivalent feelings prevailed because people both want and fear the new beginning. People tended to feel that they would not be good enough to succeed at the goal they had sought or even that they might make a mess of the effort resulting in embarrassment. To keep a clear focus in the new beginning, one needed to assess the goal in the following context: Have I developed and employed strategies to symbolize my new identify including the roles others (family, friends, employers) will play? Giving us a lens into the anxiety, ambivalence, and strategic thinking of this phase, Angel said, I was afraid that if I didn't succeed, I was going to hear all that negativism. I only wanted to hear from people who were walking in my shoes. Other than that, I didn't want to hear from anybody (Interview 1).

Out of all the pain, uncertainty, and confusion, new life develops. The person has kept a vision of the future and used resources to obtain the goal. The final result may be

something that has resided deep in one's wanting; something the person wanted a long time ago but failed to make it happen. Denise had 24 years between high school and college but she had always had this desire to get her college degree. I knew what I wanted. I had already shared in so many life experiences that I knew I wanted something better. When I went to college, I went to obtain a goal that I had not (Denise Jones, Interview 1). With this rebirth, the person begins to describe herself in terms of this new identity. At graduation, I was floating on cloud nine. I thought, Now, I am a teacher! It has been going from teacher assistant to teacher has really helped me a lot (Denise Jones, Interview 3).

Partnered with the change, transition involves a willingness to go through the pain, vulnerability, and uncertainty in order to regain a sense of personal power over the conditions and outcomes of one's life. Transition is an internal process requiring lots of energy to move quickly from hurt and pain to developing an internal and an external strategy. Bridges (1991) and Newman (1995) assert that transition is a stressful process; therefore, one must work to maintain one's physical health. Finding some continuity in one's environment assists in this effort.

#### Ambivalence in The New Beginning

As with all teacher candidates, student teaching/internship for participants was the bridge between the school-to-work transition. For the four participants who had three or more years of experience, the bridge was shorter because they only had six weeks of supervised teaching. This abbreviated experience put them into the job market sooner than other teacher candidates. Participants saw this as both a bonus and a dilemma because they still had to pass one last test in order to get their initial teaching license. The bonus was that they could be hired and paid as teachers for the remainder of the year because they had met all but one licensure requirement. The dilemma in taking a teaching position was if they did not pass the exam during this year, they would be out of both the paraeducator and the teacher positions. Participants were having to deal with this dilemma as their health was showing the wear and tear from years of the intense intertwining of family, job, and college. While participants gained new excitement about having accomplished their goals, they pondered the what ifs that emerged as the themes for ambivalence. What if: I had learned more about the laws? Don't pass the exams? There isn't a job when I finish? I have to go back to being a paraeducator? I don't master this new grade level curriculum? As we listen to their stories, we see that each participant continued to stay focused on their goal of being a teacher and she sought positive strategies to lessen negatives.

Although each participant expressed uncertainty about all the legalities governing her interaction with the wide array of students in her classes, she knew they would exercise disciplined compassion. Over their years as paraeducators, they had seen their teachers treat students with both compassion and disdain. They just wished they could recall what the law said about specific issues, especially issues pertaining to some disabilities. Connie stated, I wish I had paid more attention to the courses with the laws like PL94-142. I should've been paying close attention to all the laws. Now as a teacher, I need to be very careful in the classroom (Interview 1).

While happy and excited about having completed the experiential and coursework requirements for teacher licensure, each participant still queried what if I have to go back to being a paraeducator? They reported having made the kinds of grades they wanted in their teacher preparation coursework and having received top rated performance during student teaching. Positive self reports about their student teaching internship suggested that other teachers and supervisors in the schools had acknowledged favorably their performance. Yet, they still worried about failing and having to go back. These worries were fanned at their work sites. They felt that it might be safer to go back to the paraeducator position but they also knew they had accomplished this goal and did not want to go back. Now, they felt like and could act like a teacher. Angel's story painted a vivid picture of this deliberation.

When I finished my student teaching, I had a large decision to make. I was offered a teaching job but I still had another part of the test to take. I was so excited about getting to be a teacher in my own classroom. I was torn between going back to my teacher assistant job and taking this job the principal offered me. I was also told that I needed to complete this test this year and if I didn't I'd be out of a job. With my husband's backing, I decided to take this job. When I made the decision, I suffered the ridicule of those who found out about it. They said, You've got to be kidding! You didn't leave your teacher assistant job to take a position that you haven't been certified for yet. That was a very hurting thing for me. (Interview 1)

Another thing that contributed to each participant's mutually conflicting thoughts was what if there isn't a job when I finish? Each participant finished her coursework at times that were not the standard times for finishing college. Those with the abbreviated experience finished in the middle of a semester. Brenda finished late during the summer when many school systems had to have their employees in place. So, they worried about the lack of a job after taking so much from their families for such a long time. Brenda's quandary highlighted this ambivalent feeling.

It was mixed feelings, especially not knowing whether or not I was going to have a job. By the time my summer student teaching was going to be ending, people were going to be through looking for teachers to employ. I ended up not getting a

job in my own county but in Cherokee County because I did not already have my license. Cherokee County hired me because they had a shortage. I went there but I was only there for two months because the drive there was long and it was a terrible strain with my children. Mr. Blanchard let me know when there was something available in Preston County and I came back in October that year. (Interview 1)

The dread of licensure testing contributed greatly to each participant's mutually conflicting thoughts. They queried, what if don't pass the exams? Each participant reported that passing the standardized tests that would allow her to get a clear initial teaching license surpassed all the other quandaries. The shame of having to take the test more than one time was fanned from many corners. As unlikely as it seems, Angel experienced taunting from test site administrators. Angel shared, When I had to keep going back to take the specialty test, some of the people issuing the test would say, Oh boy, here she comes again. That hurt me. I went through a lot of emotional changes (Interview 3). Many accounts of the taunting fanning the participants' ambivalent feelings came from their school work environments. Brenda was dejected about what she was hearing.

Knowing that my job weighed so heavily on my test, I didn't talk to people at work. There was already a lot of peer talk that I wouldn't be coming back because I didn't pass my test. It was a lot of stress because I had to resign in April and wait and take the test again. So, I didn't know if I was going to have a job next year. I thought, Okay, a teacher assistant position was going to be there but who wants to go back. (Interview 3)

Each participant felt she had learned a lot about teaching, especially in the grade level where she had done her student teaching. In that experience, they had close supervision but now they were on their own in their classrooms. They felt they could handle discipline and some of the other areas they had heard were difficult for new teachers. However, each reported feeling overwhelmed as she sat in teachers' curriculum planning meetings at the beginning of their teaching experience. While mulling a strategy for quick learning, they queried, what if I don't master this new grade level curriculum?

Once I received this job, I had to adjust to the students at this age and a curriculum that was from what I was familiar with. Of course, there were quite different expectations for second and third graders versus fourth and fifth graders. That sort of scared me. I found a teacher at this grade level who helped me. She would find different things she thought would be helpful for me as a new teacher because she knew that I was under a lot of stress. (Ebony Johnson, Interview 2)

## Personal Changes from Paraeducator to Professional Educator

Personal changes signaled that participants had stopped becoming and had become transformed. Four themes emerged that revealed a different part of the transformation: I am a teacher; personal power; power over life's outcomes; and uplifting influence. Each participant reported changes she had seen within herself and changes others in her environment had seen. While participants tended to see the changes as positive, some family members, colleagues, and friends gave the changes negative labels. Participants chose to accept the hurt and pain and use it to their advantage to gain a sense of personal power over the conditions and outcomes of their lives. To build a strong person in this new beginning, each participant acted with conviction as a teacher. They had raised themselves up from persons with low self-confidence to persons with enough confidence to assert themselves on issues important to them. They took charge of events in their lives and used their fortitude to help others meet challenges and grow strong. They would in turn use this personal victory to help their family members and students get more out of their lives, regardless of their current circumstances.

I am a teacher. At this point, each participant had stopped preparing to become and had become the person in the new role she had envisioned. Her hard work had paid off and now she was the teacher. This was not only a change in position but a major change in mindset.

Each participant had been transformed from being servile in the classroom to being the leader in the classroom. This transformation involved caring and planning for the whole child not just the child's academics. In this new role with this new frame of mind, each participant reported realizing that she could not turn off the caring at the end of the workday, she had to plan for active engagement of the wide diversity of students and she was responsible for all her students. For each participant, their primary functioning in this new role centered on their students. Ebony's story illustrated the transition or change in mindset from being a paraeducator to being the teacher.

I wouldn't suggest that an assistant just come in and say, 'I can do this' because there is a lot in the transition part of it. You really have to want to be a teacher. Any person who is an assistant and who is thinking about going back to school will have to weigh every area because the responsibility is great. In the back of my mind, I knew that once you got certified, you really had to be accountable. As an assistant, I could just say we had a rough day today with Jeffrey and that was the end of my worry. As a teacher, I have to worry about what Jeffrey does because I have to find some way to reach and teach him. I can't cut it off at the end of the day. I go home but I still think about what lesson I need to plan for Jeffrey, what I need to prepare for the low readers, or what do I change for the exceptional child. I have to make sure that I cover all those areas. (Interview 2)



Also, as the teacher, each participant realized she had to interact with other teachers and members in the school community. They remembered how they had been treated and were determined to treat all persons in the school community with dignity and respect. Brenda's story highlighted this concept.

She did not want me to have any part of the room and the kids felt that which made it very hard for me to control them. They looked to her as the teacher and I was just there. She went through about two months where she wasn't saying anything to me. It was very difficult to work with the children and to work with her. She would leave notes for things she wanted me to do. I would not do that to anybody! (Interview 1)

Personal power. Hayes (1989) and Tisdell (1993) stressed that socialization, unequal access to power, and educational systems favoring male characteristics (linear, objective, and analytical) had negative effects on women. Results for women were low self-esteem, lack of confidence, and the devaluing of emotions and relationships. Participants began their dream feeling devalued and with low self-esteem. However, armed with the competencies needed to perform this new role, participants not only saw the new position, they saw themselves as new. The change with its attendant internal transition resulted in each participant articulating her new personality characteristics. They saw themselves as having become confident, sensitive, more determined, and assertive. Brenda said, "I'm normally a very quiet person but I've come out a lot in the last couple of years" (Brenda Smith, Interview 3). Each participant reported seeing herself change from being a pushover to being outspoken by the time she was finishing college.

By the time I finished college, I was getting to be more outspoken. I used to be a touchy person my emotions were so sensitive that I would cry in a heartbeat from what people said because it would hurt. I had gotten to the point where I was the one constantly calling and trying to make the contact. So, I had to stop because I was beginning to feel like I was putting myself on people. I thought, "You're allowing these people to use you. You've got to stop." It has been a hard learning experience and I still haven't reached where I want to be but I can see where I've come a long way. If you say or do something I don't like, I'm going to compose myself and then tell you about it. So, I'm much more outspoken now. (Denise Jones, Interview 1)

Experiencing success led to changing low self-esteem into pride in oneself. This pride in oneself grew to encompass all environments. Initially, participants would only think the thoughts of feeling good about anything they did; they would not voice it. Data in this study revealed that when others around them would acknowledge improved or good performance, they would belittle the accomplishment or give the credit to someone else. However, as the successes mounted, participants gradually began to accept credit

for good work and to voice pride in their accomplishments in any environment. The successes in college led to the determined confidence to perform in the current position with confidence as Ebony related.

I've become more confident in what I'm doing. When I first started school, I had very low self-esteem and lacked confidence. Once I got into college and found out that I was able to be successful, I became a little more confident, a little more sure of myself because I realized I could do different things. I had a lot of experiences in clubs learning how to conduct myself in a professional manner. I made the choice to go to college and I've experienced a lot of things that I didn't really think I could do. I look back and I'm really surprised at where I am now. I'm proud of myself and my family is proud of me. With determination, I thought I will see myself through this regardless of you. (Interview 3)

The personal power found in focused determination was a characteristic that kept each participant going in the face of turmoil. Participants refused to lose their focus on their vision because they felt they would fail if they did. This focused determination tended to serve as a shield against negativism. Angel's thought highlights this concept.

I could never ever think about the fact that maybe I won't. I didn't allow myself to say, 'Maybe this isn't meant for me.' I couldn't allow myself to say that because I knew that if I did I was going to be in trouble. Going back to college, I was more focused and determined. I knew what I wanted, was going after it, and I did get it. (Interview 3)

Each participant functioning in the give-and-take of numerous relationships learned she had to withstand verbal, nonverbal, direct and indirect assaults. Throughout their journey, they had to endure a great deal to prevail to obtain their goal. They had to exercise a strong mind and strong will to manage the complexity and flexibility in their personal, work, and professional lives. Connie's thoughts amplify this concept.

I'm strong-minded and strong-willed. I can withstand a lot and go through a lot. I'm just not that type of person to stand and allow wrong to go on. I will speak up. I've learned not to be afraid to voice my opinion. (Interview 3)

Power over life's outcomes. From using the propelling experience as a jumpstart, lessening the financial impact on their families, proving the naysayers wrong, and meeting their physical demands in going to college, each participant felt she could meet any challenge in life. Each had been a victim in at least one of her adult life roles and each had been a victim at work with at least one supervising teacher. Definitely, each had been a victim in the experience that propelled her to make a change. The barrage of disparaging comments served to make each participant feel victimized, also.

Trying to take themselves out of the role of victim, participants tried to hide the fact that they were going to college. Trying to hide did not work as participants were in the ending phase of disenchantment. So, getting to their neutral zones, wherever and however they found them, was essential so participants could come up with workable strategies for moving from victim to taking charge. The neutral zone looked and felt chaotic because its formlessness and lack of easily identifiable markers. Because the neutral zone is a rich time for solitude, contemplation, and self-discovery, each participant found her place and came up with strategies for gaining power over life's outcomes. Their strategic thinking helped them grow to feel empowered both in their personal and professional lives. Not only could they stand up for themselves, they could take a stand for their own children and the children they taught.

Their thoughts paint a vivid picture of some of their strategic thinking. Their strategies developed from dire need and/or pain but the strategies worked because they were very personal, emanating from transforming the mind from victimization. For example, Angel found a good use for bad experiences as she related below:

Sometimes you can have a bad experience and it'll help you. What was meant for my harm turned out to be used for my good. One day another assistant ridiculed me and I told her, In the next couple of years, I will have my license. When I told her that, I had not started one single class. But when I said that and then saw her everyday working with me, it was a constant reminder that I needed to do what I said and go back. ( Interview 3)

Rather than wallow in the pain, each participant chose to learn from experiences and gain strength from them. They learned that if at all possible, they must conceal the pain they were feeling and present a positive face. Ebony highlighted this concept.

I think bad times make you stronger. I don't know about everybody but give me a bad time and I'm determined to not let it be bad. Bad times bother me but they also motivate me to out do you. I have to let you know I can weather the storm. I set out to better myself. I like to look good and feel good. (Interview 3)

In the neutral zone contemplative time, participants would revisit the victim situations to try to find a way to use the bad situation for their good. One part of the thinking in this process was the lamentations. Analysis of data uncovered that participants would wonder: Why did this happen to me? What's the point of seeking help? What's the use in trying a different way? As they wrestled with their lamentations throughout their journey, participants engaged in self assessment. In assessing themselves, they checked out who they were, where they were now, and where did they want to go. They knew where they wanted to go and this became the anchor point for each trek into the neutral zone. Participants had many neutral zone opportunities;

consequently, they had many reflection and self-discovery opportunities. Denise provided a view into these lamentations.

Before, I would not have thought about trying to get out of a bad situation. I'd say, 'What's the use?' But now I say, 'I don't have to stay in this. I can rise above this. Then, I go out and I try to do it. We shouldn't settle for what's the use. We need to apply ourselves and do all we can to be all we can be. Over the last few years, I've done that. As a teacher assistant, I couldn't make choices. So, if I didn't like the situation, I had to do something about it. Now I have that college degree and I can make choices. We all need to be able to make choices and not just accept the blows that come to us. (Interview 3)

After using their strategic thinking to gain strength from bad situations and using their contemplative time for self-discovery, each participant felt she had what she needed to take charge of her life. Each self-assessment revealed that pain would continue throughout the journey but her portrait to the world did not have to reveal the pain. With their personal tools, they were able to make choices to effect outcomes in their lives. Now, they could tackle the things that surfaced during this transition from paraeducator to professional educator.

Now, each participant reported having positive self-esteem and self-confidence. They were strong and had wisdom from dealing with their many situations. They had gained an ability to speak out and take charge of not only home situations but work situations, also. Each participant expressed that while she was a paraeducator and student toward the end of her college experience, she began to feel empowered. In their roles as mothers and teachers, they felt comfortable and were ready to take a stand on issues affecting their own children and their students. Taking a stand that benefitted her child and the other children in her colleagues' class even though she was a new teacher, Brenda's story highlighted this empowerment.

I went to my son's teacher and asked about her grading system that was confusing. She didn't say anything to me but she went to the principal and cried. A couple of days later, the principal called us to her office. She told the teacher, 'Ms. Smith had a question about your grading; maybe other parents have questions, too. Other parents had asked about it but because I was a teacher there and asked about it, the principal said my job was on the line. I knew the situation had been blown way out of context when I got that threat. But the parent in me came out and I was there to defend my child, my son. (Interview 3)

Uplifting influence. Haselkorn & Fidler's (1996) Class Ceiling survey respondents said that career advancement translated into a brighter financial future for the paraeducator's family. Having seen the paraeducator obtain her degree, other family members could see the possibility of higher educational and career aspirations. The

influence of the paraeducators having achieved her dream could extend possibly beyond the family. Because the paraeducators tended to stay in their communities, her career development added to the social capital of low-income and minority communities. Also, because she knew the community and was known in her community, she connected better with the schools and the communities they served. Striving to obtain teacher licensure to advance from paraeducator to professional teacher, each participant exemplified this advancement-uplift principle.

Participants knew the students in their communities could achieve their dreams because they came from these communities and they had achieved. However, they knew that as teacher assistants, they had been exposed to some teacher behaviors, like Ebony's fifth grade experience, that doused hope and bashed dreams. Each participant as teacher was determined to help her students advance academically, behaviorally, socially, and emotionally. They were committed to the whole child's growth and development. Connie reflected on her possible role in the vicious cycle of pushing a student down when she was a teacher assistant.

As a teacher assistant, I did not realize how teacher labeling would hurt a child if he had some academic issues and was a discipline problem. Teachers would silently label this child as not going to do anything and just kick him to the side. She didn't care whether he did anything or not as long as he sat there in that chair and didn't have a behavior outbreak. In looking back, I have to say, I probably played a part in, 'Yeah, just sit there. Don't do work.' Now, I realize that those children should have been addressed more aggressively and not let just sit there all day. They can be taught, they should have been taught, and they should have been made to do their work. I can see now that had those teachers back then been doing that, it might've made a big difference. (Interview 3)

Each participant felt empowered personally and professionally so she sought to empower her students. Having been successful traversing the rugged terrain of their journey, they used the personal power lessons they had learned to help their students. One of the lessons they shared with their students was no matter where you start, you can do more and should set higher goals. Ebony's thoughts exemplify this goal setting charge that she gained from her life mentor.

You can do anything you put your mind to if you're willing to work. No one should say I can't. There's no reason for it. I think that's what Karen saw in me. I had been out of school for so long but she still saw something in me that would put me in positions where someone could see, if she can do it, I can too. I'm helping children to have a goal. I hope I'm instilling in them the ability to go for it. I want them to know that regardless of where you are, where you are coming from, or where you think you might be going, if you have a goal in mind, you can achieve it. (Interview 3)

In order to uplift their students, each participant expressed that she knew she had to expect her students to give more than the students knew they had in order for them to experience success. Each participant had learned that each little success led to bigger successes and that these successes helped her feel better about herself. Gaining confidence with the successes led to obtaining goals and achieving dreams. Participants had learned that family members, the life mentor, and administrators had expected a lot of them and had been there to encourage and push them higher. So, this lesson of supporting high expectations for everyone was another one they shared with their students. Angel's work with her diversity of students exemplified this principle.

The phrase that all students can learn, I'm in that corner now. I used to hear that and I would feel like some children struggle and I don't care what you do you can't bring them where they belong. But I've changed that. I found that they may not go where all students go but they can make gains. They can reach their highest potential if we work with them. Just take a student at face value and start there. We could learn a lot from that. For example, all of my exceptional students, except one, passed the state writing test and most of them were threes. The highest you could make was a four. This let me know that if you work with them and put forth an effort, they will give you what you're looking for. Seeing this will cause you to realize that I've got to set high expectations for every single student. It doesn't matter if they're in an exceptional class or if they're 504. My expectations for those students are for them to pass. And it has changed me. (Interview 3)

Career advancement translated into a brighter financial picture for each participant's family because her salary almost doubled. When family members saw that the participant had obtained her degree while working full time and taking a heavy course load in college, they not only imagined but believed that they could attain higher educational and career aspirations. Family members observed participants going through their journey. Participants received validation of how proud family members were through various comments they made. Now, filled with self confidence, each participant accepted positive comments from family members. Ebony's interaction with her own children showed this validation.

My children know now that mom did it; so, they can't come up with a lame excuse why they can't. They respect the job that I do now. They have made comments, Well, maybe I shouldn't have given Mrs. X such a hard time. Now they realize that it wasn't always the teacher but that they should have been better. My youngest one says, Mom, why do the kids say that they love you? I say, Because I really care about them and I think they feel that. When my kids see me working at home marking papers, they'll do some little nice thing for me. They'll say, I don't see how you do this day in and day out, mom. (Interview 3) However, even more important than the family's observation of the journey was

family discussion about the participants going through the journey. Participants felt they needed to make explicit their thoughts, feelings, and actions to their family members as they encountered hardships. Participants with elementary age and older children felt this discussion was necessary so their children could be engaged actively in the reasoning to get to a decision that would impact the entire household. They saw family discussion as healthy and essential to letting their children see the value in persevering to obtain their goal. Angel reflected on one of their many family discussions.

My husband felt my pain and my children felt my pain because I discussed everything with them. I had a son who was in his first year of college, my middle son was getting ready to go to college, and my baby boy was in high school. I wanted them to experience the successes and the failures. I wanted them to know that anything you go after in life, you're going to have to work for it. So, when I was happy, I shared it and when I was sad, I shared it. I think we need to do that because we need to let people know that life is not always fair. If you're going to do anything, then you have to be determined that you're not going to give up. You're going to have to persevere. They saw my perseverance and I think it did something for them. So, it changed us in my household. (Interview 3)

### Administrators Throughout the Journey

Administrators played a vital role for participants throughout the journey. They were essential in the novice phase as participants progressed from college through licensure, the first theme that surfaced. The second theme explicated the administrator role during the apprentice phase, participants' first three years of teaching.

Neuman and Simmons (2000) contend that leadership must be shared or distributed to encompass the entire education community, that is, principals, teachers, staff members, parents, students, district personnel, and the community at large. When leadership is distributed, everyone uses their knowledge, skill, and ability in taking responsibility for student achievement. This then becomes the professional learning community.

Sergiovanni's (1994) concept of community identifies relationships in the school as the key. In a true school or professional learning community, relationships are based on shared values rather than bureaucratic roles. The result is individuals who care, listen, understand, and respect others. In all interactions, individuals are honest, open and sensitive to the needs of others. In order to build this kind of community, Lieberman (1995) says principals must

act as partners with teachers, involved in a collaborative quest to examine practices to see how they can improve what the school is doing for all of its

students. Principals do not control but, rather support teachers, helping to create opportunities for them to grow and develop. (p. 9)

Principals play a key role in creating conditions which enable schools to become professional learning communities (Louis, Kruse, & Raywid, 1996). To have the greatest impact, principals must see themselves in their job as helping to create a professional learning community in which teachers continually collaborate and learn how to become more effective (DuFour and Eaker, 1998; Lieberman, 1995). When principals model these values, teachers in turn feel safe in building a learning community in their classrooms where there is a common goal, risk-taking for the sake of learning, and sharing.

Neuman and Simmons (2000), through the Arnenberg Institute, worked with numerous practitioners from several schools across the country of varying size, student population, location, and levels of achievement over the past five years. Their research led them to conclude that leadership focused on student achievement is a key to success. In these learning communities, the vision is shared, priorities are clear, and students are at the center of teacher learning; that is, the focus is on student learning where teachers actively engage students in making meaning (Danielson and McGreal, 2000; DuFour and Eaker, 2000; Lieberman, 1995).

A school whose focus is on improving student achievement gives priority to ensuring that students feel that they are known and that there is at least one adult on campus with whom they can connect. This relationship allows open and honest communication in which students feel they can speak with this individual about concerns and issues. In this environment, all adults are committed to talking with students on a daily basis wherever they see the student in the classroom, in the halls, and in the breakfast and lunch lines. The emphasis is on getting to know the students, finding out what is best for each student, and making decisions based on that knowledge rather than control and punishment (Neuman and Simmons, 2000).

Participants primarily encountered principals who were supportive of them during their novice and apprentice phases. Superintendents and principals supported and encouraged participants in achieving their dreams by providing information about financial opportunities and conditions for release time. Denise related that the superintendent called all the teacher assistants to a meeting and they discussed a new program (Interview 1). Some other types of principal support follow: job networking opportunities; strategies and encouragement throughout high-stakes exams; and celebrating successes.

Novice phase--college through licensure. The novice phase began in college and lasted until they had met all criteria for initial state licensure. For participants, this usually meant that they worked with teacher pay the remainder of the year they finished their student teaching until they passed their last tests.



In this region of the state where it was difficult to attract and retain teachers, principals were always looking for ways to secure good teachers. When they had paraeducators in their schools, they observed them as they did teachers. Principals seemed to use this as one of their strategies for encouraging paraeducators to become teachers. The principal observed Ebony teach students in the reading computer lab and pushed her to get teacher licensure. Ebony deliberated.

One day after observing me, my principal said, Have you ever thought about going into education? You'd be a good teacher. The first thing I said was, No. I didn't see the experience in the lab as teaching but then I thought about it. I am educating this child. They have to listen to me and I get them out of this defeated attitude of I don't want to be here. Then my mindset started to change. In September, the principal gave me this packet and said, This is an opportunity for you to pursue your certification with the teacher assistant scholarship. The deadline is October. Have it back on my desk by a certain date. So, I felt that he was in his own way saying, go for it. (Interview 1)

When a participant encountered hardship with her exams, her principal encouraged her to persevere because they felt she was a very capable teacher candidate who would pass the tests. The principals gave study tips and other test-taking skills as encouragement. To ensure that these teacher candidates who had been successful with students during this short period of time were afforded the opportunity to continue getting teacher pay while they took the tests and waited for their results to come in, the principals networked with fellow principals who were looking for teachers. Not only did the principals make other principals aware of these teacher candidates, they notified the participants when jobs became available. As Brenda began to reflect on her journey, she recalled many types of help her principal had provided.

I was trying to get in the school system so that I could take evening classes. So talking to this principal, I was able to get in the school system as a teacher assistant which helped me greatly. After graduating, I was looking for a job and he was there to let me know when something was open. That was helpful to me. Once I was in the school system trying to get my certification, he was there to talk to me and give me positive advice and that was very beneficial. Just knowing that he was there to talk to me, give me advice, and follow through with me, I was able to succeed and come back the following year. (Interview 3)

Principals used their collegial network to assist participants when they had exhausted efforts in their school districts. Some school districts had more difficulty attracting and retaining teachers so principals knew when their fellow principals were looking for teachers. These principals had first-hand experience with the high quality instruction provided by participants needing this kind of networking. So they had no

qualms recommending participants to their colleagues. Angel provided details about the networking.

My principal said, Angel, the new school year is getting ready to come and you still haven't finished the last part of your specialty area test. I just can't see letting you just go out there with nothing. I'm going to make some phone calls because I believe in you and believe that you're going to pass it the next time you take it. He contacted one of his colleagues. This principal said, Yes, I'd love to have her because he had so many openings. I stepped into that position and that's where I am now refusing to leave even though I've had several job offers. (Interview 1)

One negative situation appeared to be an aberration but is worthy of reporting because it could keep some persons from pursuing their dream. One principal started out supporting the participant in releasing her for a portion of time to go to college. However, as time went on and as the participant got closer to her last year of college, this support ceased. This was the only instance of cessation of support for participants in trying to obtain their goals. The participant was really hurt because she had a long-term association with this principal who stopped supporting her, even to being on the interview team who recommended her as the principal for the school.

I took a half day off on Fridays in order to drive the 2½ hours needed to get to River City. Sometimes I would take a whole day because I needed to do assignments. I tried to make it easier by telling the principal to give it to me without pay so they could hire somebody else for that time. I was willing to make that sacrifice. She worked with me very well the first three years that I went to college. My last year when I came back to school, she said, Ms. Anderson, we will not be allowing you to leave on Fridays because the teachers have complained. Of course, I knew it was only my teacher that had complained about having to have the class by herself on Friday afternoon. So, she gave me that ultimatum. I guess she thought I was going to quit school but I didn't; I quit work! Before this mess with this particular teacher, she totally supported me through the three years I was going back to school. (Connie Anderson, Interview 1)

Apprentice phase--first three years of teaching. Participants encountered principals who were supportive. Only one instance of non-support was reported. Ebony's first-year principal was the exception to being supportive. At the time of the interviews, participants were still working in the schools where they had begun their careers once they had met all criteria for state teacher licensure. Ebony and Brenda had a different principal each of their first two years. Brenda's second year principal remained as her third year principal. The other participants had the same principal for the three years of the apprentice phase.

In the exception case, the participant came into the system as a teacher when the climate was inhospitable. The climate in her school was difficult, also. She did not feel supported by her administrator during this year. She felt her first-year observations by her principal were overly critical. She felt as if the principal was being unfair because she was a minority teacher in a predominantly white school. She reported that at the end of the year, her students' performance was at the top and she felt successful. Ebony shivered as she related this experience.

The administration, principals, and teachers were not on the best accord; so, it was like a battleground. I don't feel that my principal felt I was capable of doing the job on this level. That was a test of my endurance and I went through a lot that first year. I'm a good observer and I saw that a technique Mary used was fine but if I were to do the same thing under similar conditions, it was not acceptable. I felt she was severely critical because this minority was coming in a predominately non-minority setting. Looking back at it now, I still feel that way. My colleague was in the same position, same entry level, same university, same credentials, but being of opposite race, she was accepted. I felt the bias was reflected in my evaluations. If I read those evaluations now, they still give me chills. They upset me quite a bit. I cried many nights when I went home. I'd be furious through the day, grit my teeth, conduct class, and go home and fall apart. After a length of time, my principal had to concede that I knew what I was doing. At the end of the year accountability, my class performance was top rank in this reading program. (Interview 2)

The supportive principals created the kinds of climates indicative of a professional learning community. Principals truly listened and cared about teachers in an atmosphere of respect and open, honest communication. Denise said, "All my administrators have been more than supportive. They let me go in and vent if I have to. I found that they really listen" (Interview 3). In this respectful, caring environment, each teacher reported connecting with students so that students felt they could speak with the teacher about concerns and issues. Denise shared:

If they have problems with other teachers and other students, they'll come to me because I let them know, "You can come to me. You can talk about anything. If you don't want to talk about it to me then I'll lead you to someone who can help. Some things they want to talk about, I really prefer that they would not but it's all about trust." (Interview 2)

These supportive principals encouraged, created, and selected opportunities for teachers to grow and develop professionally. Participants were at the end of their first three years and their principals were encouraging them to seek national board certification, the highest recognition of excellence in teaching. Their principals saw their working with students, parents, and colleagues as indicative of national board

certification and each participant expressed this as a goal. In addition to recognition, teachers receive monetary rewards--an additional 12% added to the base salary. Just let me know what you need. Go for your national board certification (Connie Anderson, Interview 3). Principals not only used formal strategies for learning opportunities, they used everyday interaction as learning opportunities. Angel commented:

If he sees a workshop that he knows I need to be in, he'll bring it to me. He'll come with an article or a newspaper clipping that he has found about writing and he will share it with me. On Monday when I go to my mailbox, I can look for something that he has read about writing over the weekend. (Interview 2)

Angel related how her principal clearly communicated the expectations he had for students and teachers. Most participants had principals who communicated a strong emphasis that everyone in the school building was there to assist with student learning.

My principal's motivational technique is to let you know what his expectations are and then push and support you in making it. Then, he doesn't just let you stay there; he asks for more and that is motivating for me. He sees in you sometimes what you don't see in yourself. At the end of my first year, he said, "Okay, we made 48% proficient this year. Next year we go for the top. And I thought, this man has a lot of confidence in me. At the beginning of my second year, he said,

Angel, the state is really grading tough this year. I was asking you for 70% but if we can do 60% this year, I'll be happy. We did much more than that; we did 80% and he was just ecstatic. (Angel Williams, Interview 3)

Each participant reported that principals modeling of really getting to know the students and in turn this made it easy for her to find out what was best for each student and to make decisions for each student based on that knowledge. Just as principals expected teachers to get to know their students, these principals used a variety of strategies for getting to know participants. Initially, they had and used their collegial references and references from individuals who had worked with the participants. They also used artifacts in portfolios participants brought with them to the interviews. After the first year, they used participants' class and individual student performance and other observational data.

My principal told me that from my interview, he knew I could handle anything. I attribute my interview success to my training at Thorpe University. After he looked through my portfolio I had done for exiting my program at Thorpe University, he just figured I could conquer the world. My administrator was very pleased with my attitude, that I was happy about teaching and that I wanted to be teaching. He said, "I care about you as a whole and I care about what you can teach. Keep the right frame of mind. (Angel Williams, Interview 3)

## Reflection on Findings

In explicating the underlying themes or delving below the surface of what happened, I revealed the contour of the journey in which achieving the dream was molded by propelling experiences, hardships, and supports tempered by a plethora of feelings. These factors then led to the new beginning, the teaching career. The changes participants encountered on this journey caused them to transform themselves and in turn use this new self to uplift others.

The journey had a configuration shaped by pain, sadness, frustration, and low self-esteem tempered by perseverance, flexible thinking, exploration, success-making, goal-setting, and strength. Participants' change in concert with transition involved a willingness to go through the pain, vulnerability, and uncertainty in order to gain a sense of personal power over the conditions and outcomes of life. Transition, the internal process, required a great deal of energy to move quickly from the hurt and pain in some of the changes to developing internal and external strategies. With this type of physical and mental manipulation being so stressful, participants' health suffered toward the end of the paraeducator portion of their journey.

For all but one of the participants, achieving the dream was precipitated with an episodic event that propelled participants into ending a social relationship. The other participant had an early going-to-school experience, that in reflection, propelled her. The propelling experiences shaped participants' interactions with students and colleagues. This ending pitched participants into a zone where they made the choice to use their energy in a productive manner to develop strategies to achieve their dreams. Participants refused to dwell on or listen to negatives when hardships arose. They used all types of supports to help them in obtaining their latent goal of becoming a teacher.

The new beginning, the teaching career, was filled with excitement at the beginning and had lasted through their first three years of teaching. Finally, participants had stopped preparing and had become the person in the new role they had envisioned. Participants began their dream lacking confidence and with low self-esteem. However, their trek through their college teacher education program filled them with the competencies needed to perform this new role, the teacher. They experienced much success in their coursework and their clinical internship where they had glimpses of themselves as the teacher. The rugged part of this trek for most participants was their difficulty with passing the nationally standardized exams required in the process to become a teacher the first time they took them. Once participants met all criteria for state teacher licensure, they not only saw the new position, they saw themselves as new. The change with its attendant internal transition resulted in participants seeing themselves as having become confident, sensitive, more determined, and assertive. While participants saw the changes as positive, some family members, colleagues, and friends did not like

the changes. Again, participants turned these negatives into positives and used them to benefit themselves and their students.

Participants encountered administrators along their journey who influenced them. Most of the interactions were positive and proved immensely beneficial to participants. Participants encountered principals who were focused on creating or sustaining a professional learning community. Working with these principals, participants saw a common goal focused on student learning. Participants were allowed and encouraged to take risks for the sake of learning and then they were encouraged to share what they had learned. These school environments fit with participants' emphases on getting to know the students, finding out what was best for each student, and making decisions based on that knowledge. These principals supported participants in their continued learning and they celebrated their successes as teachers in a variety of ways. Participants modeled the relationships in their classroom learning communities upon the principal's model. In their learning community, relationships were based on shared values where individuals respected others, listened, and showed caring and understanding. Participants felt empowered personally and professionally; so, they sought to empower their students. Having made their journey from paraeducator to professional educator, participants had a desire to uplift the students with whom they worked. They encouraged their students to set high goals and then work to obtain the goal. Participants conveyed the essence of the journey as dreaming leads to achieving through fortitude and action.

CHAPTER VI  
CONCLUSIONS, REFLECTIONS AND  
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

I lead best when I forget about myself as a leader and focus on my group, their needs and their goals. To lead is to serve. To give to achieve together.

(Kathryn E. Nelson, Educator)

Overview

In this chapter, I conclude this study by reflecting on the keys to success that participants described in making their transitions from paraeducator to professional educator and the lessons that may be applied to educational practice and research. The picture that emerged from their journey revealed four common elements: (a) leadership support; (b) financial support; (c) family support; and (d) personal power. The five women s working to achieve their goal, encased in a common time frame, began with an experience that propelled them on their journey.

In this chapter, I share my perspectives on the primary lesson from participants stories that seeing one s dream is necessary but not sufficient to achieving one s dream; that seeing the dream must be accompanied by determined actions and fortitude. From this primary lesson, the four common elements highlight keys to success.

Distilling the participants stories into these four keys tends to close the hermeneutic circle for this experience. Because hermeneutic phenomenological writing continues to lead to reflecting and the desire to investigate, then I choose to start another circle by presenting implications for practice and future research that might come from these implications. To conclude my journey in this experience, I share some of the challenges this dissertation has afforded me.

Keys to Success

Four elements emerge as keys to success in looking at how participants made the transition from paraeducator to professional educator. Together, these keys intermingle in the multifaceted roles of these minority women lives to help them rise from low status and lack of self confidence to competent, confident, professionals who are willing to share their stories with their students in order to inspire them.

## Leadership Support

Leadership support emerged as one of the keys of success in a very strong way throughout participants' lived experiences. This key had the institutional structures of the public schools and the university that contained the two elements of organizational flexibility and administrator support. The organizations, public schools and college, had to exhibit flexibility in order for participants to experience success. Both organizations had to develop or allow flexibility in the use of time. This flexibility in the use of time had to be embedded in the culture of caring in the professional learning community led by supportive administrators.

First, I will discuss the public schools' flexibility and administrator support. The primary flexibility required of public schools was willingness to allow release time. All participants worked full-time and had one-way driving times from 30 minutes to 2½ hours to university classes. Participants' workdays typically ended at 4:00 p.m. and evening classes began at 5:00 p.m. Only two of the participants had the shorter, 30 minute drive. For the other participants, release time was required in order for them to make their evening classes on time.

Doing the required focused classroom observations necessitated flexibility in use of time. Although participants were working in schools already, they had to do focused observations that were tied to the course competencies. As teacher candidates, they had to perform many hours of focused observation across the scope of their specialty curriculum. This meant that participants had to be given permission to observe in other classes within the school and in other schools in the district. This form of flexibility in the use of time was critical for focusing and refocusing the lens of theory applied to practice. This constant, immediate adjustment of the lens could serve to reduce the chasm between knowledge and practice. Thus, providing release time for travel and focused observations was an essential element of public school organizational flexibility.

The most essential administrator through their journey of transition was the principal. The principal in the role of providing administrator support had to lead organizational flexibility. To facilitate this organizational flexibility, Lieberman's (1995) partnering principal had to engender Sergiovanni's (1994) respectful community to embed a culture of caring in the professional learning community. One component leading to success was the climate created by the principal in the school. When the principal's school functioned as a community where people respected each other and the focus was on students, then, the school tended to function as a learning community.

In this environment, the professional learning community, when a teacher failed to value the paraeducator-participant's desire to learn more and achieve a degree leading to teacher licensure, the principal modeled valuing achievement by having open communication, showing respect to members in the community, and being sensitive to



the needs of others. For the participants whose propelling events occurred at work, the principals listened to the paraeducator and the teacher and showed sensitivity to needs by making changes necessary for an effective, professional growth community. Specifically, when the principal saw and heard that the working relationship between the paraeducator and the teacher failed to focus on student needs, he/she moved the paraeducator to work in another classroom with a better teacher-paraeducator match for meeting student needs.

The principals modeled valuing achievement when they sought and gave participants information about financial resources to help them through their journey. Principals gave test-taking advice when some participants experienced difficulty with licensure exams near the end of their quest for teacher licensure. Equally important for the three participants with the need to bridge the end of their coursework with meeting all requirements for licensure, was the employment with teacher pay. Although these participants experienced duress in this situation, principals were there to encourage them and to assure participants that they could and would succeed.

Principals monitored the newly-licensed teachers' instructional practices and their induction into the professional learning community. Principals appreciated the excitement and management strategies participants brought with them as they showed in their working with the challenging classrooms they were given in their first teaching assignment. Induction with these challenging classrooms sometimes led to differences with colleagues or the principal as two participants recounted. The principal who threatened the participant with loss of her job for questioning one of her colleagues' grading practices showed support although the participant did not view the principal's final actions as supportive. First, after listening and gathering data, the principal left the resolution of the issue to the two same-grade level teachers. Second, the principal asked the participant to be one of her teachers in her newly-organized school because she wanted the best team she could have to open her new school. Even the principal who the participant felt was not supportive initially and overly critical of her instructional practices conceded that the participant's student performance and parent support contributed very well to the school goal of high student achievement. Even though the behavioral and learning challenges were great, participants demonstrated values of caring and excellence by having their students perform at levels principals expected to meet their school goals of high student achievement. Further, principals modeled valuing achievement when they encouraged these values of caring and excellence by putting participants in areas of need to show the outcomes of the shared vision focused on high student achievement.

Essentially, the principal was critical in leading organizational efforts for paraeducators in accomplishing this journey. The principal used communication and management skills to coach continuous learning while expecting high student achievement. Further, the principal supported the teacher across the life cycle continuum of novice and apprentice phases.

Now, I will examine the university's flexibility and administrator support. At the university, the two elements of organizational flexibility and administrator support had to exist to facilitate the kind of success experienced by participants. The university had to exert flexibility in designing a structure within the institution and delivering it at times that would allow participants to maintain their full-time jobs. This flexibility was essential because participants needed to put their meager salaries and benefits afforded full-time employees with their spouse's salary to meet family needs. The weekend-evening college structure was designed and delivered to meet this need. This program was designed to attract the non-traditional student, that is the working person who wanted to obtain a college degree but whose schedule would not allow attendance on the regular day college schedule. All services associated with regular day college were made available to weekend-evening college students.

Within the weekend-evening college, the teacher education program had to exercise flexibility in putting forth the array of sequenced coursework and experiences needed by participants to obtain the degree. The respectful community that participants experienced when they were admitted to the teacher education program had to include the support of advisement but not just any type of advisement. The advisement provided to these working adults had to have caring about each individual, counseling to continue until the end, and just listening when these adults felt the need to talk about work, children, finances, or other any other issues. This value-added advisement was supported further by having persons who had been or were professional educators teaching the courses to the participants. Thus, the Neuman & Simmons (2001) concept of school-student connectedness could be applied easily to this group of professors in the university setting as a parallel component of the continuum needed to prepare high quality teachers. When the focus is on improving student achievement, then the priority is to ensure that students feel that they are known and that there is at least one adult on campus with whom they can connect (Neuman & Simmons, 2000).

The emphasis on getting to know the students, the school (program)-student connectedness, and helping participants heighten their decision-making skills fueled the successes participants recounted over and over again. Participants engaged with instructors and like-minded peers who celebrated successes with them. Their last year of coursework, the methods courses and student teaching, were critical in helping participants see themselves as teachers. For these persons who lacked confidence and had low self-esteem when they started to now experience one success rapidly on the heels of another was the inverse of their initial propelling experiences.

These bit-by-bit successes experienced in college grew to climax at the point where participants first glimpsed themselves as real teachers, a major milestone in the transition process. Five categories of successes seemed to be milestones in this transition process. The first experienced success was going to college. Breaking out of the familiar work, mother, community, and self relationships required taking a stand while moving

into the unknown. Yet, participants did the planning and took the actions necessary to negotiate the journey to obtain their goal.

The second experienced success was getting accepted officially into the teacher education program. Whether or not the participants had difficulty with passing initially the standardized test for program admittance, they were anxious about this step. In their admission portfolio, they had obtained positive recommendations from their principals and faculty who had taught them, met the GPA requirement, and demonstrated satisfactory communicative competence but they still worried about whether or not they would be admitted. They knew they had to achieve this milestone in order to begin to develop competencies deemed necessary for teachers. Participants expressed great joy about their success in accomplishing this milestone.

Gaining and demonstrating technology competencies was the third experienced success. For all but one of the participants, this was an expressed anxiety for them. They felt they lacked the knowledge of students just coming out of high school and they would not be able to keep up with work requiring the use of newer technologies. However, when participants had to apply their new learning on real course tasks that could benefit them in their work and at home, they were excited about their learning. New learning of these new technologies was another success in accomplishing this milestone.

Microteaching, the fourth experienced success, was a key step in participants realizing that they were in their new beginning, that is, approaching the end of getting ready and acting on their dream of being the teacher. Participants reported being anxious about teaching their planned lessons where they tried out various components of teaching functions to their peers and professors. However, they were excited about the positive feedback and they felt successful. This was the point in the process of transition where participants first glimpsed themselves as real teachers.

Student teaching, the final experienced success, was the climax where participants realized an even greater level of being the teacher in the transition process. Finally, they were in the real environment in their new role as student-as-teacher with the patent authority and autonomy afforded teachers. They were engaged fully in the planning, implementing, evaluating, and reflecting upon students and their impact on students learning. At this point, they knew they soon would be in a position to obtain the last element in being the real teacher, getting the teacher pay-for-teacher work.

In short, college flexibility meant that the college had to come out of its traditional structure to meet the demand of its region. The region had an ongoing teacher shortage that was getting worse. The school districts had an intact group of personnel which contained a potential pool of teachers. Even with the nexus of financial assistance, these persons could not pursue teacher preparation within the traditional structure. These low-paid persons needed their full-time jobs and benefits for daily existence.

Subsequently, the college developed a structure to accommodate the time and access needs of the potential pool of persons from the school districts. Further, the college included supports designed to make the novice teachers feel connected to their teachers, their schooling, and their projected world of practice.

In summary, leadership was critical in supporting the successful transition from paraeducator to professional educator. Principals modeled behaviors they valued for focusing on students and they coached these behaviors for teachers and paraeducators. In turn, as teachers, participants modeled these behaviors for their students. Meeting students' needs became the center of their individual and collegial learning. As paraeducators, they were immersed in the school environment and this provided them with the close connection for applying theory to practice. They were able to read, discuss, observe, try out, and reflect upon the theory and practice with the support of the college and the school classroom. This continuous connection with students in the context of principal and teacher modeling led to the successful transition from paraeducator to professional educator.

Schools and colleges could assist paraeducators interested in becoming teachers by including features found across organizational lines. The features of value-added advisement, school-paraeducator/student connectedness, and valuing achievement would facilitate success supported by leadership. The features might look different across organizations but they seem to be essential for leadership to support this success.

### Financial Support

Financial support was another key to success that emerged from participants' lived experience in this journey. Haselkorn & Fidler (1996) identified financial need as the number one barrier impeding career advancement for paraeducators. Therefore, deciding to and making the time to look for sources of funding were critical steps to beginning on this journey.

After their disenchantment with their life situation--divorce or job--participants came to a point where they decided they had to do something. Teaching, a latent dream, surfaced and participants knew they could not begin this goal without financial help. Principals were critical in supporting participants' growth and development by connecting them with state sources of funding for as long as they needed help. Principals, ready sources of information on funding sources for persons aspiring to be teachers, were instrumental in leading participants to the teacher consortium.

The teacher consortium, started in the region of the state served by the university attended by the participants, focused on increasing the number of persons in the region qualified to be teachers. The original "grow your own" intent focused on recruiting and supporting paraeducators who were rooted already in participants' communities. These

rural and poor communities had difficulty in both attracting and retaining teachers where there was a great need for high quality teachers.

Each participant's school district had become a member of the consortium at least by the time she reached student teaching. This was a huge benefit to participants because they had to take leave-without-pay from work from six to eight weeks. This loss of time also cost them their benefits and put a tremendous strain on their families already extremely tight budgets. Therefore, the support from the teacher consortium of the \$500.00 per month in addition to paying for the courses--except for the \$40.00 per course the student had to pay--during student teaching was needed and welcomed. Participants expressed that they had not gone to college or gone back to college because they could not afford not to work.

Other financial supports were provided that did not carry a price tag and these were the services provided gratis for participants, often by family members. Car care services provided by the teacher at Denise's school and her uncle were essential and were done free of charge. Both the intermittent and regular childcare services provided by family members (for example, taking the children to the movies while the participant did homework, the cousin who looked after the children between the time the mother and father were away) were not price tagged. Neither was the food preparation nor delivery service charged to the participant.

In summary, financial support was essential in accomplishing this transition from paraeducator to teacher. Having the dream without the means would not accomplish the goal; both were necessary. The valued-added financial supports do not have a price that can be calculated and they were priceless in supporting participants' success. Therefore, participants' use of time during the seeming chaos of the neutral zone to plan financial support was another one of the keys to success in this transition.

Schools and colleges could facilitate the goal of becoming a teacher by continuing to make information about special financial opportunities widely and readily available through their traditional approaches. However, an enhancement is needed for inform, educate, and enlist potential teachers. The special opportunity information should be located with designated positions closer to regular contact with the paraeducator. This enhancement would allow the person(s) with the close regular contact the capability of sharing quickly the most current information and helping the person analyze its impact.

### Family Support

Family support was another key emerging from participants' lived experiences. This was an essential key given the difficult nature of family finances. Participants' immediate family provided a wide range of support. The spouses and the participants' mothers were sources of neverending wisdom, encouragement, and running interference

when necessary. The participant and spouse actively planned together in matters involving finances. The need to scale back in order for the participant to do student teaching was made easier by the spouse's assurance that they would make it financially.

The intense intermingling of roles was felt most when other family members had to share responsibilities formerly done by participants. The mother role was lessened as the participant picked up the student role. The other role that diminished was that of community member. Participants expressed that sometimes they would miss church because they had to do all the other things that needed to be done at home and they had to do homework. Participants reported that their husbands were willing nurturers to make sure they got what they needed to do their homework. When fathers needed to take on the duties usually associated with the traditional mother, that is cooking, cleaning, and laundry, they did that. When the student-mother needed time away from the children to study, the father saw that she got this time. The four participants with spouses were fortunate to have supportive spouses.

Participants' mothers acknowledged that they could not help them with their schoolwork but they would help them in every other way possible. In providing support, they were shoulders to cry on, servers and deliverers of meals, caregivers to children, and prayer partners for needed strength to continue the journey. Mothers stepped in to nurse participants and/or their children back to good health whenever and for whatever length of time they were needed.

Participants' sisters, aunts, and uncles who wanted them to achieve their dream were sources of support. Sisters provided childcare and meals to keep participants going to college without worry. Other relatives provided information and transportation to make sure participants continued their journey. Participants readily acknowledged throughout the three interviews the vital role their families played in helping them reach the goal of moving from paraeducator to professional educator.

Participants were able to pursue their goal because they had the family support structure to assist with one of their primary concerns, childcare. Providing childcare services is an area in which school systems and colleges could assist paraeducators interested in working toward the goal of teacher licensure. The value-added service of providing quality childcare could benefit persons who lack the level of support given by participants' families.

### Personal Power

The three previous keys represent external elements that helped participants achieve their dream. However, this last key, personal power, is the internal key to success. In order to achieve their latent dream of becoming a teacher, participants had to engage in transition thinking. There were many events along the participants' journeys

that resulted in changes. The changes were external and the key to success in handling the changes was the internal thinking, the transition thinking.

Participants used a process for quickly managing the numerous changes for their benefit. Participants stayed focused on their dream and went after it with fervor. They set a goal to accomplish the dream. They sought counsel with necessary parties and made a plan to accomplish the dream. Then, they set out on a course of action to make the dream come true. They consistently used this see-plan-act sequence for the big picture goal, for short-term goals (getting through the first course), and intermediate range goals (getting accepted into the teacher education program; getting through the second state licensure exam, etc.). In the participants' process of managing the goal, a life mentor emerged. This person, from whom they would seek counsel, was a professor they met early in their college career who coached them in their multifaceted roles. Participants trusted this person and they shared their hurts and joys as they experienced them along the journey.

In the key of personal power, participants exhibited fortitude, that is, the strength of mind that allows one to endure pain and adversity with courage. Although participants experienced emotional pain much more frequently than physical pain, each one experienced illness during the journey. During Angel's first course in the teacher preparation sequence, she was trying very hard to maintain the intensity of the many life roles in which she was engaged already while adding the new role of college student. In the new role of college student, she was determined not to perform as she had when she went to college just out of high school but to make the top score on every assignment and test. Performing at the maximum in all roles caused her to experience intense illness which she had to get under control. During student teaching, Denise broke a bone in her foot, ending college and interviewing on crutches, and Brenda developed an ulcer. During the first few months of teaching, Ebony became distraught to the point of crying uncontrollably one morning in the parking lot at work. Connie remained healthy despite the serious, long-term illnesses of her children. With these episodes, participants used the transition thinking of "I have a goal and I've come this far. I will not be kept from obtaining my goal."

Physical pain paled in comparison to the many emotional pains inflicted upon participants. In figuring out how they made the transition, the following statements paint a picture of the participants' transition thinking exhibiting their personal power. Angel decided that she could get bitter or she could get better when she encountered her propelling event. Brenda decided that she would not leave her children with anyone other than trusted family and she would sacrifice getting the top grade on the assignment or test to spend some quality time with her children. Connie decided that she would confront this drunken parent and win her over to help her child learn the academic content and how to behave. Denise decided that with her spare tire, her college degree, she had a choice and did not have to be anyone's servant. Ebony decided that she would not let her fifth grade teacher's comment control her life's outcome. Because participants had

become empowered, they decided to use their small beginning to influence their students to aim high for whatever they wanted to achieve. A strong component of participants personal power was their religious faith. Each participant sought religious guidance and practiced strong faith in enduring the emotional pains during their journey. Each participant continuously used her strength of mind, transition thinking, to gain control over the outcome of their lives. Schools and colleges should assist paraeducators by providing the value-added advising for assisting this transition thinking.

### Implications for Practice and Future Research

Van Manen (1997) suggests that phenomenology should teach us something about our educational practice as the study is based in real-world, lived experiences with focus on interacting with children. In gaining a deeper understanding of the given study question, Bullough & Pinnegar (2001) charge the research to provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm and settle (p. 20). In this section, I put forth the expectations from my study, the challenge of enhancing leadership support, the provocation to grow your own caring, competent, and qualified teacher, and the illumination provided by having these women tell their own stories. All of these aspects should teach us something about the practice of preparing, inducting, and retaining teachers in the profession.

I expect this study to contribute to the recognition of beginning teachers who make the career change from paraeducators to professional educators. Additionally, this study will contribute to the documentation of the experiences they encounter as they negotiate the process in their transition to their new role as professional teachers. I expect this study to contribute to the body of research regarding personal development strategies for other paraeducators interested in becoming teachers.

In this study, supports needed to facilitate the transition from paraeducator to professional educator were identified. With the supports identified, I expect this study to contribute to the practice of school leaders in recruiting and retaining minority teachers, particularly in rural areas.

Further, I expect this study to contribute to the body of literature on women's career development from their own perspective. This study suggests at least two possible areas of future research within the phenomenological tradition. Since this study explored the transition of African American women, other studies could explore both minority and majority women's journey through transition to discern common themes for the essence of the journeys. There was very little diversity of specialty areas in this study, four were elementary teachers and one was a special education teacher. However, further research could seek out and unearth common themes for the essence of gender specific journeys across specialty areas.



## Enhancing Leadership Support

Enhancing leadership support is a challenge that must be met if the education profession is going to adequately prepare, induct, and retain high quality teachers. The professional learning community described by participants, a key finding in this study, could be the basis for preparing, inducting, and retaining high quality teachers. Providing a learning community in which relationships such as caring, trust, respect, and open communication flourish must be taught to teachers and leaders. Participants thrived in settings in which leaders built this type of learning community. Some of the features in this environment are relationships exist where individuals are valued (Sergiovanni, 1994), the student is the focus of the shared vision (DuFour & Eaker, 2000), teachers are partners in the learning quest (Lieberman, 1995), and leadership is distributed among the learning community based upon each person's expertise (Neuman & Simmons, 2000).

Principals and other school leaders must be taught and must demonstrate behaviors that are valued and indicative of a professional learning community. They must be able to develop a vision for the organization that is shared. The principal must use a variety of skills, including directing and coaching, to facilitate changes that focus on students. Even when participants experienced difficulty as paraeducators in this type of setting, the principal coached the teacher and the paraeducator when appropriate and facilitated a change when necessary. Then, the school leader must encourage and allow teachers to make decisions that get to and maintain the focus on students.

School leaders must seek out and make opportunities for new teachers to engage in the high quality continuous learning that was valued in the professional learning community. These learning opportunities involved both formal and informal strategies. Formal strategies of workshops, conferences, and courses were used. However, participants seemed to value highly informal strategies in which teachers were able to learn from each other. For example, teachers read and discussed professional articles, tried out techniques, and re-engaged in discussion about appropriateness for a particular student or group. This type of collegial learning opportunity should be used to engage teachers across the life cycle, from novice to emeritus phases, of teaching thereby accessing the gamut of expertise garnered by teachers.

School leaders must demonstrate that they value engaging parents, even the difficult-to-engage parents, in the education of their children. Then, they must support teachers in their reaching out into the community. Teachers in this caring community took the risks to engage the most challenging parents and bring them into this learning community to help accomplish the academic and social goals established by principals, participants, and students. Within this open environment, principals and teachers celebrated successes regardless of how small they might seem.

Time for learning is valued for both students and teachers in the professional learning community. Usually this takes on the form of common planning or protected time for teachers. One usually does not see this type of focus for paraeducators. Yet, this same concept could be applied to paraeducators seeking their degree for teacher licensure. Research into released time for paraeducators seeking their degree for teacher licensure could provide benefits and show an impact on recruitment and retention.

### Grow Your Own Caring, Competent, and Qualified Teacher

Leaders and politicians should be provoked to make changes to entice people into teaching at this point in time when many teachers are retiring from the profession and fewer people are choosing teaching as a profession. One viable solution to the attrition and lack of selection is to grow your own caring, competent, and qualified teacher. This approach provides at least three major benefits in conjunction with building hope for others. First, reinvestment in the cultural capital of the community results from selecting and preparing as teachers persons who reside in the communities that have difficulty attracting and retaining teachers. Second, these persons tend to remain in these communities and because they are the community, they have a deep, rooted connection to the students in the schools and their parents. Third, an increase in the financial capital of the community results from these community residents having completed teacher licensure and remaining in the community. Further, they are the community and others no longer just imagine but they can see that dreams can be achieved because someone they know from the community has made it. These community teachers are seen as role models for high achievement.

Teachers must be developed that have the frames of mind, dispositions, that lead to the caring, competent, and qualified teacher who is well-versed in the complexities of school life. The school system and the college must work together to break down barriers and increase organizational connections to lessen the divide between theory and practice. NCATE (2002) asserts that every child has the right to a caring, competent, and qualified teacher. Steffy et al. (2000) call for a life cycle continuum to be used beginning with teacher preparation. There must be a closer connection, a true partnership, between schools and colleges for the novice phase, the phase that prepares teachers for the complexities of schools. More on-site school building time must be included in the preparation of teachers so theory can be read, discussed, observed, critiqued, and reflected upon in context of the practice. This type of immediate application in context was valued highly by participants.

Kaplan (1977) and Carter (1977) concluded that paraeducators who persevered until they became teachers embodied the nation's best qualities--very good students and highly sought-after employees who were effective teachers in their communities. Then, the true partnership should continue through the apprentice phase, the first three years when the new teacher is being inducted into the school, the world of practice. The

collegial learning--that participants valued and that should be a part of the novice phase--would provide a group level of support while the new teacher becomes familiar with school practices. An assigned mentor should be in place to help the new teacher become familiar with school policies, practices, and procedures. In this study, participants self-selected a mentor, the life mentor, although they had an assigned advisor. As teachers, some participants self-selected a mentor although they had an assigned mentor. An area of further research might examine the difference in effectiveness of self-selected and assigned mentors.

Close connection between theory and practice while being acclimated to the school organization must be institutionalized and realized by new teachers if they are going to continue to be excited about teaching and stay in the profession, especially in communities that have had difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers. Unlike traditional college field-based experiences, paraeducator experience afforded extended time in context. Extended time in classrooms provides for more than just a snapshot of teaching functions. This extended time would allow teacher candidates to see the wide variety of teacher functions and student behaviors in context in a supported learning environment of college and school. The outcome of this extended time should be the lessening of classroom shock experienced by many new teachers. Research in this area might be patterned after the 1970s Career Opportunities Program (COP) follow-up evaluation of first- and second-year teachers. The research would study a matched sample of previous-paraeducators and traditionally-prepared teachers on several dimensions to discern differences affecting student achievement.

Designated contact persons who are knowledgeable about the wide range of funding options should be identified at both the school and district levels as a means of capitalizing on the distributed leadership in professional learning communities. This readily available expertise about financial resources should reside as close to possible prospective parties to facilitate the grow your own approach. In this way, persons exploring the financial support needed for this goal would know where to go for questions and answers. Since financial support was one of the keys to success for persons making this career change, information should be made readily, willingly, and accurately available.

Designating a school-based teacher recruiter would enhance the grow your own approach. This could be a new role for a person who has made the transition from paraeducator to professional educator. This teacher who was a nontraditional college student--working, adult, parent--would be invaluable in mentoring other interested persons through the journey to become a teacher. The kind of quality mentoring in this new role should not be left to chance; it should be institutionalized to support success. This teacher recruiter should have an attractive recruitment area with up-to-date information and online access to college and university resources. Time must be allocated for this mentoring and support.

Test-taking and coaching sessions should be set up to assist persons in getting over the standardized testing hurdle. Haselkorn & Fideler (1996) found standardized testing to be the second greatest obstacle to career advancement for paraeducators. Test databanks with online capability could be designed and used to provide varying levels of feedback. Coaching with the test-taking should include a section focusing on thinking for success instead of failure on the tests.

### Women s Voice

The value of foregrounding women s voices is to provide an illumination of preparing the non-traditional student who is a paraeducator who aspires to become a teacher. The illumination involves recognizing and documenting the complexities and adjustments of the multifaceted, intertwining life roles used to accomplish the goal which had been a dream. This enlightenment can lead us a deeper understanding of preparing the wide variety of persons who may be interested in becoming teachers but who are wary of taking the chance of beginning their dream.

Women s voices have been presented in a marginal way when examining the career ladder aspirations for attaining an undergraduate degree to become a teacher. Persons who experience the changes and attendant transition of this journey are the only ones who can tell about the journey in the detail given in this study. The stories show not only the participants sense of self but also how they made meaning of the world--the Belenky et al.(1986) definition of voice. To capture their stories in the hermeneutic phenomenology approach, I became the brush on the canvas to engage with these five women both as a part and a whole of their life experiences and untold life stories. Their stories provided the text for the unique, particular, and irreplaceable in the change and transition.

Highlighting women s voices in these traditionally-male led institutions--public schools and colleges--exposed some taken-for-granted assumptions. Foregrounding women s voices tended to illuminate the use of Sergiovanni s (1994) community relationships demonstrating respect for all persons in the professional learning community. One taken-for-granted assumption was that challenging students did not want to learn. This resulted in a tendency to push aside challenging students, those with behavior and learning problems. Sometimes parents and teachers would accept these behavior and learning problems as reasons for academic failure without going below the actions to try to make changes geared to high achievement. Yet, when the community relationship of respect for individuals was used, there was an environment of honesty, truly listening, and open communication. This type of daily interaction with the challenging student brought him/her to the point of feeling trust in communicating about a variety of issues with the teacher. Both the challenging students and their parents were an alienated subgroup at school. So, the teacher took a bold stand to bring them and their parents into this learning community where the focus was on the student s success.

Involving and engaging the parent was necessary in improving the student s behavior and academics.

Another taken-for-granted relationship was that these poor communities were void of examples for learning opportunities. Students failed to respond and appeared to be ashamed of their parents /caregivers meager jobs when the teacher used the students communities to focus their learning in the real world. Again, when the community relationship of respect for individuals was used, the teacher used her real life story of small beginnings with students. The small beginnings story was a technique used to demonstrate respect and sensitivity to others while communicating striving for a goal. This respect and sensitivity extended outside the doors of the classroom and the school to what was known, the neighborhood, with the unknown, the academics. Helping educators learn to use whatever a community has for real-world learning should be incorporated into educator preparation programs to help build a close connection between school and home.

These attributes of demonstrating respect for all persons in the professional learning community should be infused throughout educator preparation programs. The beliefs and the actions indicative of respectful relationships should be monitored across the preparation continuum to help educators be able to identify and change taken-for-granted assumptions whenever and however they appear.

Highlighting these women s voices documents how they came from the margin of society (low status, low self confidence) into the mainstream. Including their contribution of their struggle and success has shown the value of including a variety of voices to gain a fuller understanding of the complexity and variety of adult women s lives when they seek to make a career advancement from paraeducator to professional educator.

### Personal Reflections

I end the circle of my main question as I end this dissertation. The magnitude and complexity of this task pales in comparison to the magnitude and complexity of the participants journeys. I have tried to represent fairly these women s stories because their stories uniquely and profoundly inform the traditionally-prepared education practitioner of another way of attaining the same end. Their stories portrayed the hardships or obstacles and supports that were transformed into keys for success. When success was experienced, their stories portrayed a professional learning community where leaders facilitated teacher, paraeducator, and student learning; where teachers facilitated paraeducator and student learning; and where all parties focused on student learning. My writing their stories for this study lets me know definitively that the question is not Is story telling science? but Can science learn to tell good stories? (Seidman, 1998, p. 3).

Having gone through this study process of career upgrading within a profession and having gone personally through a career move, I now understand how change is different from transition, the Bridges (1991) model. The changes my participants and I made were different but we went through a very similar internal process, transition, associated with change. The psychological processes we used to manage changes ultimately affected the outcome of any events that precipitated change. As I used the read and reread and write and re-write approach that is integral to hermeneutic phenomenology, I began to understand fully the trek through change and transition.

Participants unabashed sharing of their stories reinforces my belief of the importance of sharing, dialogue, and reflection for professional growth and development. I suggest incorporating experiences through stories of a variety of voices into teacher preparation and induction programs. Reflections could focus on dispositions, behaviors, and communication styles of the persons studied and participants of the program. Review of and reflection on these travails and successes might enhance the preparation of teachers to better serve the students in their diverse communities.

This study has proven to be an invaluable opportunity for me to learn about the intricacies and difficulty of hermeneutic phenomenology to examine a seemingly elusive concept. Having the unknown as the object of the research was a very difficult concept to handle. Having in-depth interviewing as the strategy was even more challenging. Having participants say that they really did not have anything to share about what they had done that was important was humbling to me as I began to elicit their stories. Having these five minority women engage with me as partners in this endeavor, simply because I asked them, is humbling for me and for this I am thankful. Their stories have done for me what I set out to do to find out what it is that makes some persons successful in transitioning through their career aspirations.

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APPENDIX A

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS IN

HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

## Appendix A-Data Collection and Analysis in Hermeneutic Phenomenology

STEP	TITLE	PROCEDURE	ACTION
1	Turning to the Nature of Lived Experience (Statement of Problem & Question Formulation)	Orient to the Phenomenon Formulate the Phenomenological Question Explicate Assumptions & Pre-understandings	Determine particular Interest: Paraeducator-to-Teacher Transition  Specify bias(es)/preassumptions
2	Investigating Experience as We Live It (Data Collection/Gathering)	Obtain Experiential Descriptions From Others (pp.64-65) 1)Describe the experience as you live(d) through it 2)Describe the experience from the inside: feelings;mood, emotions 3)Focus on a particular example or incident of the object of experience: describe specific events; an adventure; a happening; a particular experience 4)Try to focus on an example of the experience which stands out for its vividness, or as it was the first time 5)Attend to how the body feels, how things smell(ed), how they sound(ed), etc. 6)Avoid trying to beautify your account with fancy phrases or flowery terminology	In-depth Phenomenological Interviewing (Seidman, 1998)  Interview (the personal life story) p.66 (conversational interview)  Generate texts from interviews Read and re-read Texts Share texts with participants to verify accuracy
3	Hermeneutic Phenomenological Reflection (Data Analysis)  (Reflecting on essential themes-- meaning units, structures of meaning,themes)	Conduct Thematic Analysis Isolate Thematic Statements <i>Answer question: "Is this what the experience is really like?"</i>	Study the lived experience descriptions: read through data several times; compare transcripts with tapes; review field notes; write margin comments;  Selective/highlighting approach; Detailed/line-by-line approach
4	Hermeneutic Phenomenological Writing (The art of writing and rewriting) (Describing the Results)	Write an Anecdotal Narrative (story); Write a textual description of "What happened?"	Write,re-write (re-think, re-flect, re-cognize, p.131) Write meaningful relations
5	Maintaining a Strong and Oriented Relation (Describing the Results)	Focus on the question/phenomenon Write a structural description of "How it happened?"	Show real interest in the experience; go below the surface to get the real details; provide rich, thick description that teaches about the experience
6	Balancing the Research Context by Considering Parts and Wholes (Interpreting the Results)	Work the text Develop an overall interpretation reflecting between the 'what' and 'how' to show the "essence" of the experience	Massage the structural description/ interpretation with a focus on the research question

Source: Van Manen, M. (1997). Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy (2nd ed.). Ontario: The Althouse Press.



APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW 1

FOCUSED LIFE HISTORY

**Appendix B - FOCUSED LIFE HISTORY-- INTERVIEW #1**  
TFA Analysis

Session Question: How did you come to participate in NCMTEC? ECSU-TEP? What was it like to be a teacher assistant/paraeducator?  
(Reconstruct a range of events that place your participation in . . .)

Relationships/ Active Life Roles	FAMILY		COMMUNITY		SELF	WORK	
	Child(ren)	Spouse/Partner	Friend	Church/Club/ Organization		ECSU/TEP Novice (Paraed)	LEA/School Apprentice (Teacher)
<b>THOUGHTS (T)</b>							
<b>FEELINGS (F)</b>							
<b>ACTIONS (A)</b>							

**DETAILS OF THE EXPERIENCE-- INTERVIEW #2**

***Interview Guide***

**Session Question: *What is it like to be a teacher?***

Reconstruct a day from the moment you awoke until you went to sleep.

(Provide details about relationships with students/teachers/parents/  
administrators/paraeducators/professors, etc.)

- Prompts:**
- 1) Describe the experience as you are living it
  - 2) Describe the experience from the inside: feelings;mood; emotions
  - 3) Focus on a particular example or incident of the object of experience:  
describe specific events; an adventure; a happening; a particular experience
  - 4) Try to focus on an example of the experience which stands out for its vividness,  
or as it was the first time
  - 5) Attend to how the body feels, how things smell(ed), how they sound(ed), etc.
  - 6) Avoid trying to beautify your account with fancy phrases or flowery terminology
  
  - 7) What dimensions, incidents, and people intimately connected with the  
experience stand out for you?

Relationships/ Active Life Roles	FAMILY		COMMUNITY		SELF	WORK	
	Child(ren)	Spouse/ Partner	Friend	Church/Club/ Organization		IHE/TEP Novice (Paraed)	LEA/School Apprentice (Teacher)
<b>THOUGHTS</b>							
<b>FEELINGS</b>							
<b>ACTIONS</b>							

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW 2

DETAILS OF CURRENT EXPERIENCE

## Appendix C - DETAILS OF THE EXPERIENCE-- INTERVIEW #2

### TFA Analysis

Session Question: What is it like to be a teacher? Reconstruct a day from the moment you awoke until you went to sleep.

(Provide details about relationships with students/teachers/parents/administrators/paraeducators/professors, etc.)

Relationships/ Active Life Roles	FAMILY		COMMUNITY		SELF	WORK	
	Child(ren)	Spouse/Partner	Friend	Church/Club/ Organization		ECSU/TEP Novice (Paraed)	LEA/School Apprentice (Teacher)
<b>THOUGHTS (T)</b>							
<b>FEELINGS (F)</b>							
<b>ACTIONS (A)</b>							

**DETAILS OF THE EXPERIENCE-- INTERVIEW #2**

***Interview Guide***

**Session Question: *What is it like to be a teacher?***

Reconstruct a day from the moment you awoke until you went to sleep.

(Provide details about relationships with students/teachers/parents/  
administrators/paraeducators/professors, etc.)

- Prompts:**
- 1) Describe the experience as you are living it
  - 2) Describe the experience from the inside: feelings;mood; emotions
  - 3) Focus on a particular example or incident of the object of experience: describe specific events; an adventure; a happening; a particular experience
  - 4) Try to focus on an example of the experience which stands out for its vividness, or as it was the first time
  - 5) Attend to how the body feels, how things smell(ed), how they sound(ed), etc.
  - 6) Avoid trying to beautify your account with fancy phrases or flowery terminology
  
  - 7) What dimensions, incidents, and people intimately connected with the experience stand out for you?

Relationships/ Active Life Roles	FAMILY		COMMUNITY		SELF	WORK	
	Child(ren)	Spouse/ Partner	Friend	Church/Club/ Organization		IHE/TEP Novice (Paraed)	LEA/School Apprentice (Teacher)
<b>THOUGHTS</b>							
<b>FEELINGS</b>							
<b>ACTIONS</b>							

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW 3

REFLECTION ON THE MEANING

## Appendix D - REFLECTION ON THE MEANING-- INTERVIEW #3

### TFA Analysis

Session Question: Given what you have said about your life before you became a teacher and given what you have said about your work now, how do you understand your experiences enroute to becoming a teacher? What sense does it make to you?

Relationships/ Active Life Roles	FAMILY		COMMUNITY		SELF	WORK	
	Child(ren)	Spouse/Partner	Friend	Church/Club/ Organization		ECSU/TEP Novice (Paraed)	LEA/School Apprentice (Teacher)
<b>THOUGHTS (T)</b>							
<b>FEELINGS (F)</b>							
<b>ACTIONS (A)</b>							



## REFLECTION ON THE MEANING-- INTERVIEW #3

### *Interview Guide*

**Session Question(s):** Given what you have said about your life before you became a teacher and given what you have said about your work now, how do you understand your experiences enroute to becoming a teacher? What sense does it make to you?  
 Given what you have reconstructed in these interviews, where do you see yourself going in the future?

**Prompts:** Making Meaning=  
 addressing the intellectual and emotional connections between work and life  
 look at how factors have interacted to bring them to their present situation

- 1)How did the experience affect you? What changes do you associate with the experience?
- 2)How did the experience affect significant others in your life?
- 3)What thoughts stood out for you?
- 4)What feelings were generated by the experience?

Relationships/ Active Life Roles	FAMILY		COMMUNITY		SELF	WORK	
	Child(ren)	Spouse/ Partner	Friend	Church/Club/ Organization		ECSU/TEP Novice (Paraed)	LEA/School Apprentice (Teacher)
<b>THOUGHTS</b>							
<b>FEELINGS</b>							
<b>ACTIONS</b>							

APPENDIX E

IRB HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH FORMS

(Date)

## **ATTACHMENT 2 - INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT**

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
202 East Eggleston  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

Consent To Be A Research Subject

Dear (Name)

My name is Margaret Cole White and I am a Graduate Student at Virginia Tech. I am inviting you formally to serve as a partner and participating-interviewee in constructing and narrating the experiences of women who were teacher assistants who successfully made the transition to become teachers. This research study will share voices from your personal and professional lives as you progressed from teacher assistant to teacher. I will do this by recording the stories of experiences determined by you.

You are invited to participate in this research study which aims to tell the story of your transition. I will meet with you at a time and location, convenient to you. We will meet on three occasions for a 90-minute interview each visit. During the visits, I will ask you to tell me about your life. The content of our discussions will be entirely up to you, but I hope through my guiding questions to learn about the major events in your life, both positive and negative, influential people or situations which affected you, and any wisdom or guidance you might share with others who wish to make this transition. You may decline to answer any of my questions or add anything you wish beyond the scope of my questions.

Our conversations will be tape-recorded. Typewritten transcripts of my notes, our conversations and your stories will facilitate my having as much information as possible about your life. After each tape has been transcribed, I will destroy/erase it. You will have the opportunity to review each transcript and make changes, deletions, or additions. Also, you will be allowed to review the final written report of the research study before it is made public and again make changes.

Pseudonyms will replace the names of the interviewees. In discussing some of your experiences, you will naturally refer to individuals and/or colleagues by name. These names will be changed. For example, a male professor may be referred to as Dr. C. If you should give any information regarding you or others, which might be considered negative, hurtful or provocative, it will be changed. I am confident that this can be done without significant risk to the integrity of the report. I will destroy all other written materials associated with the study upon completion of the research study.

I do not believe there are any risks associated with your participation in this study but before agreeing to participate in this research project, please read the following explanation of the proposed procedures. It is important that you understand the purpose, benefits, risks, and precautions associated with this study.

(Date)

## **ATTACHMENT 2 - INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT**

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
202 East Eggleston  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061

I agree to participate in a research study conducted by Margaret Cole White and the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. This study is dissertation research for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. It is being conducted under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Jean Crockett.

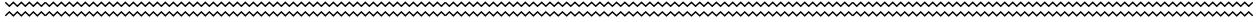
As described earlier, the purpose of this study is to share the lived experiences through the voices of teacher assistants who made the transition to become teachers. By agreeing to be a part of this study I understand that I will participate in three 90-minute interviews that will be held at times and locations most convenient to me.

I know that I may withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in this research study at any time. Duration of participation is limited to the time necessary to complete interviews. I also understand that findings of this research may be published and shared in journals, articles, speaking engagements and/or conferences. I further understand the interviews will be audiotaped and that these tapes will be destroyed upon completion of the transcripts.

I realize that I may be asked to provide a vita, pictures, and other documents that will be held as confidential until the end of the study. If I am uncomfortable about such disclosure, I understand that I am not obligated to provide such memorabilia. There are no risks to subjects associated with participation in this research study. Names of individuals I may mention in the course of the interviews will remain confidential and will not be used in any reports of the research. A summary of the research will be available to me at the end of the study.

I acknowledge that my participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty. I will not receive any type of compensation for participation in this study.

Any questions I have concerning any aspect of this research can be answered by Margaret Cole White (252.330.4445) or by Dr. Jean Crockett (1.540.231.4546, work).



**STATEMENT OF CONSENT**

**I have read and understood the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.**

**Participating Interviewee's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

(Date)

**ATTACHMENT 2 - First Contact (Telephone/email/fax/letter)**

Dear (Name),

I am currently working on dissertation research for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (also called Virginia Tech.). The purpose of my research is to share the voices through qualitative interviewing of a group of women who worked as teacher assistants during the time they were enrolled in their teacher preparation coursework at Elizabeth City State University. All of these women had to have used the resources of the North Carolina Model Teacher Education Consortium (NCMTEC), have worked in an NCMTEC school district, and be working currently in an NCMTEC school district.

You are being invited to participate in this study by allowing me to interview you. I look forward to working with you. Please understand that your participation and responses will be valued highly and any mention that is made of others would be kept confidential. I will follow up with a phone call regarding meeting time and place. Your participation will necessitate a total of three 90-minute interviews on different days.

I look forward to speaking with you soon. I appreciate your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Margaret Cole White

# Margaret Cole White

406 Esclip Road  
Elizabeth City, NC 27909  
Phone/Fax: 252.330.4445  
Email: mcwhite@net-change.com

**Exceptional Children/Student Services Director**  
**Edenton-Chowan Schools (NC)**  
<http://www.ecps.k12.nc.us>

## VITA

### ACADEMIC DEGREES

Ed. D.	Doctor of Education	2002
	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	
	Educational Leadership and Policy Studies	
M. A.	Hampton University	1980
	Communication Disorders	
B. S.	East Carolina University	1972
	Speech Pathology and Audiology	

### LICENSURE AREAS

Speech Pathology and Audiology--1972  
North Carolina Licensure (#2728) in Speech-Language Pathology--1977  
(National) Certificate of Clinical Competence from the American Speech-  
Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)--1982  
Learning Disabilities--1977  
Physically/Orthopedically Handicapped--1981  
Program Administrator for Exceptional Children--1988  
School Administrator, Principal--1988  
School Administrator, Superintendent--1988  
Curriculum Instructional Specialist--1988  
Mentor--1989  
Mental Retardation--1989  
Preschool Handicapped--1989

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

1997-2000	Interim Director of Teacher Education-Elizabeth City State University
1994-1997	Northeast Region (NC), Regional Accountability Consultant
1988-1994	Camden County Schools, Director of Special Programs
1988-1993	Elizabeth City State University, Diagnostic Coordinator
1977-1988	Elizabeth City-Pasquotank Schools, Speech-Language Educational Diagnostician



1983-87 Elizabeth City State University Lecturer, Special Education  
1984-85; 8/87-12/87 Elizabeth City State University, Speech Specialist & Instructor  
9/82-12/82 Elizabeth City State University, Lecturer, Special Education  
1972-1977 Newport News Public Schools Speech-Language Pathologist

### **DESCRIPTION OF MOST RECENT PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES**

*Exceptional Children/Student Services Director* administers the exceptional children program and coordinates student services personnel for the Edenton-Chowan Schools (NC). This position is responsible for program management, personnel, fiscal management, communications, and liaison with other agencies for services to students with disabilities and limited English proficient (LEP) students.

*Interim Director of Teacher Education* supervises/directs the teacher preparation program. This position represents the Elizabeth City State University Teacher Education Program in program management/oversight across the campus, state, and nation. Coordinated development and implementation of the first master's degree program, Advanced Master's in Elementary Education. Wrote and obtained grants focused on improving teacher preparation.

*Regional Accountability Consultant* supervises/directs the testing, reporting, and evaluation program for twenty school districts in northeastern North Carolina. This position provides regular staff development and updates to specified school district contacts. Contacts and training for district and school personnel are done via a variety of technologies. Analyzing data and assisting schools/districts in applying their data are paramount functions in this position.

### **OTHER PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES**

Member, Board of Examiners, National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)

Member, Advisory Board, National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching (NPEAT)--National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)/ National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) joint venture in Graduate Programs

Coordinator, Advanced Master's Degree in Elementary Education Proposal and Implementation

Chair, Teacher Education Advisory Council of Elizabeth City State University (ECSU)

Chair, National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) at ECSU

Member, Board of Directors, North Carolina Model Teacher Education Consortium

Consultant, HBCU Technical Support Network, NCATE/AACTE

Consultant, Shaw University for NCATE Accreditation

Consultant, Saint Augustine's University for NCATE Accreditation

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Writer for ECSU

Member, ECSU Graduate Record Examinations Task Force

Member, State Workgroup on Reevaluation of Exceptional Children

Member, State Workgroup on Testing Students with Limited English Proficiency  
 Regional Screener, Teaching Fellows Commission  
 Clinical Fellowship Year Supervisor (ASHA)  
 Statewide Policy and Oversight Committee on Transition (for Exceptional Children)  
 NorthEast Region Representative for the statewide Exceptional Children's Program  
 Administrator's Liaisons (PALs)  
 Member, State Evaluation Committee on Teacher Education (SEC) of the State Board of  
 Education  
 Test Item Writer for the Educational Testing Service (ETS)-National Teachers  
 Examination (NTE) Committee  
 Site Coordinator for The Psychological Corporation National Standardization Project in  
 the Elizabeth City-Pasquotank Schools  
 Coordinator, Staff Development, *Current Policy and Program Operation In Exceptional  
 Children Services*, (for teachers, administrators, and support personnel) for 10  
 northeastern counties  
 Coordinator, systemwide Staff Development, *Wordprocessing and Desktop Publishing  
 Applications*, (for special programs, support, and clerical personnel)  
 Coordinator, Cooperative Staff Development, *Current Issues for Exceptional Children  
 Support Teams*, (for teachers, administrators, and support personnel) for 10  
 northeastern counties  
 NorthEast Region Representative for the State Exceptional Children Director s Advisory  
 Group  
 Member, State Task Force on Autistism

**PROPOSALS (FUNDED)/PUBLICATIONS**

1999--Performance Assessment, \$5,000.00 funded by NCATE to facilitate development  
 of performance assessments for candidates preparing to teach.  
 1999 Enhancing Teacher Preparation, \$60,000.00 funded by Title III to establish a  
 computer-based testing center on campus.  
 2000-Enhancing Teacher Preparation-Diagnostic Coordinator, \$39,944.00 funded by  
 UNC-GA to improve faculty knowledge and student performance of Praxis  
 testing.

Frederick, T. L., Woledge, D., & White, M. C. (2000). Weaving Outcomes into  
 the fabric of the program. In Boyce C. Williams (Ed.), *Reforming teacher education  
 through accreditation: Telling our story* (pp. 75-96). Washington: National Council for  
 Accreditation of Teacher Education.

Hawkins, B. D., Bracy, P. B., Drane, J. S., & White, M. C. (2000). Beyond the  
 network. In Boyce C. Williams (Ed.), *Reforming teacher education through  
 accreditation: Telling our story* (pp. 143-184). Washington: National Council for  
 Accreditation of Teacher Education.

## **HONORS**

North Carolina Speech and Hearing Association Award

Letter of Commendation for Inservice Training Program on Improving Student Writing

North Carolina Jaycees' Finalist for Outstanding Young Educator

Letter of Commendation for Presentation at National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) in Washington, DC

Letter of Commendation for appointment to State Board of Education's State Evaluation Committee on Teacher Education

Certificate of Recognition for Exemplary Service Finalist-State of North Carolina

Who's Who Among American Teachers 2000 and 2001