When Identities Align

An Examination of Co-Constructed Identities

Autumn Messier

An Honors Project Submitted in Fulfillment

of the Requirement for Honors

in

The Department of Educational Studies

The Feinstein School of Education and Human Development

Rhode Island College

2024

Table of Contents

What Defines Me, and How Do I Define It?

Learning and Teaching with Purpose

The world of teaching is complex, and oftentimes it is hard to tie all of the difficult pieces together to become an exceptional educator. Many factors play a role in how successful a school community can be, but what stands out to me is the classroom environment that is created. Throughout my project, I have been particularly curious about the student/teacher relationships and how these relationships can help build a positive classroom environment. I firmly believe that without first building these positive relationships, the possibility of learning in a middle school classroom will vanish. It is because of this, that I examined if and how the relationships between a teacher and student make a difference in the overall learning and growth of a classroom. I have developed one central question, alongside three sub-questions which include:

> *How do the identities of both the student and the teacher in a classroom make a difference in the overall student engagement and learning in the classroom?*
>
> *What does identity development look like in three different students in a middle school?*
>
> *What are the theories and motivations of a middle-level educator as they plan their daily lessons?*
>
> *What does this mean for me as a professional middle-level educator who is developing her own identity?*

To examine these essential relationships, it is crucial to understand the identities of each student in front of me. Nakkula and Toshalis's (2010) theory of Co-Constructed Identity has helped to support my own belief on how the identity of my future classroom will be a combination of both my students and my own identity. When beginning to consider my future students' identities, I first had to undertake an in-depth examination on my own. In being able to look inward, I was able to reflect on my own experiences to better understand my own identity.

By reflecting on my own identity, I was able to confront my own biases and become more receptive to beliefs different than my own. In understanding co-construction and power in a classroom, how I am growing with my students can be more clear and deliberate. By reflecting On Kayi-Aydur's (2015) definition of identity I have more clearly defined what identity means to me. Identity is "multiple presentations of self which are (re)constructed across social contexts and demonstrated through actions and emotions, [it is] multifaceted, dynamic, a site of struggle, and shaped by power relations between the individual and Others." (p.138) By examining power relations in my own life, I have more effectively conducted research in a seventh-grade English classroom, because I now understand how class and gender impact students' learning and my own teaching In addition to conducting this research, I am not able to more consciously consider each student in my own classroom going forward. The goal of this research has been to build on skills that I have learned throughout my education at Rhode Island College and become more deliberate in using those skills in my own classroom. In first understanding the power dynamics of class and gender, I have and will continue to more thoughtfully consider how students and their teachers interact.

Lutrell (2016) inspired me to center in on my research and deeply examine two pieces of identity. Although there are many facets to identity such as ability, sexuality, race, and many more, for the purposes of this project I examined two that strongly impact my identity as an educator, class and gender. Using the lens of class and gender, I examined different factors that helped to shape my identity and began to break down and examine the "Why?" of my own identity. In examining the past, I can more deliberately shape my identity in the future. By deliberately shaping my own identity, I can more thoughtfully understand my students and be able to cultivate a more welcoming space for learning.

     This section reflects on the three components that have most heavily influenced me. Beginning with my family, I examined my upbringing and how the women in my life have shaped my adolescence, and how this has rooted my identity in adulthood. Next, I will reflect on my relationships to better understand the different power dynamics in my life. Lastly, I reflected on my education and relationships with my teachers, and how this continues to impact my learning.

Family Ties

     My maternal great-grandmother, Doris, grew up in the Great Depression with six siblings, feeling lucky to have food on the table during her childhood. She was unable to finish middle school and had to get a job by the age of fourteen, to support the household. My maternal grandmother, Rosa, is an immigrant from Italy and was forced to navigate through cultural and linguistic barriers alone. Due to her father's disbelief that women should receive an education, she was forced to quit high school and begin her adult life to provide for her family. On her eighteenth birthday, she was already married and had her first daughter. My mother, Patricia, potentially better off than two generations prior, became pregnant with me at the age of nineteen. This determined her life and future before it had even begun. The social-class barrier had been set so early on, these three women would be working-class for their lives, and it seemed inescapable for me and any generation after. It was not that any of them were not smart, it was quite the opposite. The problem that arose was a lack of opportunity through the systemic oppression of class and gender, which led to their inability to become formally educated.

     Growing up, I was fortunate enough to live with these three women in the same household. All of their personalities were strong and ironically enough completely contradicting each other. Despite their fundamental differences, their desired end goal was the same, to send

me to college. Pishghadam, Golzar, and Abdullah Miri (2022) discuss the concept of *mirrors of power*. They claim that a part of identity is mirroring those in power around you. Using this frame, I have been able to more thoughtfully reflect my adolescence. I can now name this as mirroring, which has helped to shape me into who I am becoming.

My great-grandmother could have been easily defined by her independence and stubbornness. She constantly reiterated the need for me to do everything independently. Sitting and rocking with her on the porch for years, I was able to hear all of the things she wished she had done when she was my age. She spread the constant reminder for me to "travel and see the world while you can." My independence is a direct mirror of hers and has helped to shape me to make decisions for myself. I hope to share this power I have gained from her and allow my future students to make their own decisions as well. By allowing them to make choices for themselves in the classroom, I would like to promote agency in their development.

My grandmother is easily defined by her sometimes overbearing boldness, thoughtfulness to everyone around her, and feminist mentality (even if she doesn't know it). Her mantra "You don't need a man, get educated," has and will forever echo in my brain. Memories of her studying with me for hours on end stuck with me, and made me realize that we were learning together. It is because of her that I never once put any male relationship over my success. She was able to express to me the power struggles that oftentimes come with being a woman but did not quite have the words to describe it. Through this project, I can now use theories and concepts to name and exemplify her beliefs.

Educational Experiences and Social Implications

Content in school always came easy for me, making most of the workload in my K-12 education fairly easy. Where I struggled, however, was articulating my thoughts in classroom

discussions. I would often think of an answer presented by a teacher in my head, and then be too

afraid to speak in front of the rest of the class. Between a mix of fear of getting the answer

wrong, and just hearing my voice in a room full of my peers, I lacked confidence. At the time I

had no words to explain this lack of confidence but Klein's (2014) beliefs on working-class kids

in the classroom helped me have the words to narrate my story. She states that working-class

parents, such as my own family, were less likely to encourage their children to ask questions and

more likely to emphasize obedience and deference to teachers" (p.1). As I reflect on my own

educational experiences, I believe this statement to be true that even with the power of women, I

was afraid to participate in classroom discussions. This is important to my future students

because in understanding their different class backgrounds, I can provide more opportunities and

strategize support so that everyone will be given a chance to participate.

Although school was a top priority for me, what solidified my comfort in a classroom

were the teachers who helped me to vocalize my thoughts. To understand how to deliberately be

an excellent educator, I had to first understand my struggles and successes in K-12 education.

From elementary school to high school I had experiences that now help me to determine the type

of teacher I want to be. Of course, the contents of each class were important, however, what left

lasting impressions for me was how each teacher interacted with their students. As Klein (2014)

additionally states "If some children won't speak up, the teachers need to reach out" (p.2). By

creating comfort and communication in a classroom community, students are more likely to

speak out regardless of their class status. Through my own experiences in school, I have seen this

to be the case, and I have researched in a school why this is true.

I went to a predominantly middle-class, elementary school, Woodridge Elementary

School in Cranston, Rhode Island. According to the Rhode Island Department of Education's

report card, the school is ranked three stars out of five as of the 2021-2022 school year. The ELA

proficiency is ranked at 48.6% and there are 280 students compared to 32 faculty members.

What sticks out in my memory the most is the close-knit connections to the PTO parents and

teachers throughout the school. With the more wealthy parents, came more involvement and

participation in the community. As a working-class family, my parents and grandparents were

busy making a living and did not have extra time to join the PTO or be active participants in

school. My perception as a student was that teachers paid more attention to those of a higher

class. Due to my feelings of isolation, I want to be deliberate in making sure all of my students

feel cared for and included.

I have vivid memories of being in my sixth-grade class and completing a math

competition class-wide. My teacher made comments to the students whom she thought were

aimed to be the most successful, and I was not one of them. Looking back now I can see that it

decreased my self-esteem to know that I was not included. When it came time for the award

ceremony, I sat next to a boy who was projected to win the award. Second and third place were

announced, which left only first place which the announcer emphasized was a girl. As we sat

criss-crossed on the floor, my peer whispered to me "A girl?! Who in this room could have

gotten first?" To my surprise, and notably everyone else in the room, it was me. After that, I

became slightly, but not much more confident in my academic abilities. It was later on in that

year, that I wanted to challenge myself with honors courses in middle school, to which my

teacher responded "I don't think you can handle it, but you can have a parent override my

recommendation." With the women in my life, I decided to have my mom override the decision,

and with that started my middle school experience.

Why Does It Matter?

It is important to reflect on my education experiences, so that I may consider their implications on my own professional identity and actions. There are strategies that I found effective and ineffective as a student, but it is important to consider the individuality of each student. To avoid my own biases in teaching, I have interviewed three diverse students to regain a type of paradise (Adichie, 2009). By considering the danger of my own single story, I questioned each belief that I had and considered its implications for my future students and classroom.

Over the past six months, I observed how a seventh-grade ELA teacher, BR's identity, evolves alongside her students' identities. Through my interviews and observations, my professional identity has been and will continue to develop. By consequently reflecting on multiple participants' identities, I have been able to further push my skills as an educator and a researcher. One of the main questions I considered through my research, is how positive and negative relationships influence both the classroom community and learning of the students. This is significant to this project because I believe that teacher-student relationships are the foundation for a successful classroom. Answering these questions and understanding the motivations presented will help me to be more deliberate in my classroom environment.

As I am entering my first year of teaching, I am hoping to be as successful as possible in building relationships, a classroom community, and engagingly teaching content. By observing a veteran educator, I have been able to actively engage and ask questions about her motivation process. This matters not only to me but to any new educator looking to strengthen their classroom. By strengthening relationships, I am considering how it will help to develop the content, allow students to build their agency and curiosity, and it will help both to learn.

Review of Literature

The Co-Construction of Young Adolescent and Teacher Identity

Teaching content in a middle school classroom is difficult without also understanding each student as an individual. It is not sufficient to simply appreciate that someone has a different or similar background, but it is essential to understand how these differences have shaped each individual differently in society. Harro's (1986) Cycle of Socialization illustrates that regardless of which content is being taught, identity is a universal component that must be addressed in each classroom. Harro states that "regardless of the content we are teaching, we have been exposed, without initial question, to a strong set of rules, roles, and assumptions that cannot help but shape our sense of ourselves and the world" (p.29). By understanding each student as an individual, a classroom community will be built more intentionally and allow for a more inclusive learning space.

Harro's Cycle of Socialization begins with birth and touches upon different forces that continue to breed inequality in society. By engaging the different components of identity in the content with students at a personal level, the students will first begin to understand who they want to be and how to treat others. On a larger scale, it is important to collaborate on an institutional level with the school. By instilling elements of inclusivity and understanding into the climate of the school, the result will be a better understanding of everyone's identity. As I am uncovering the different layers of identity in a seventh-grade classroom, I believe it is also important to look at the school and district policies that are in place to bring it back to a personal level for young adolescents.

Similarly in Kirk and Okazawa Rey's (2019) beliefs on identity, the authors examine three different levels which include the micro, meso, and macro level. The micro level allows the

individual to gain a sense of self, similar to my introduction. The meso level discusses

community, which in this study will be in the classroom. As Harro's theory discusses first

socializations, the meso level applies to how both the students and teachers treat each other in a

smaller environment. This is all relative to the bigger picture, which in Harro's theory results in a

change of consciousness, to eventually lead to liberation (Harro, 1986). This liberation in Kirk

and Okazawa's theory will result in a change in the macro-level, which would eventually result

in a change of structural inequalities. Kirk and Okazawa-Rey's belief, which has helped to shape

my own, states that "identity formation is a lifelong process" (p.11). My identity is continually

changing along with the students and teachers that I have studied. The concept of

Co-Construction states that different identities influence each other to form a new environment,

which is evident in a classroom setting (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2010).

.
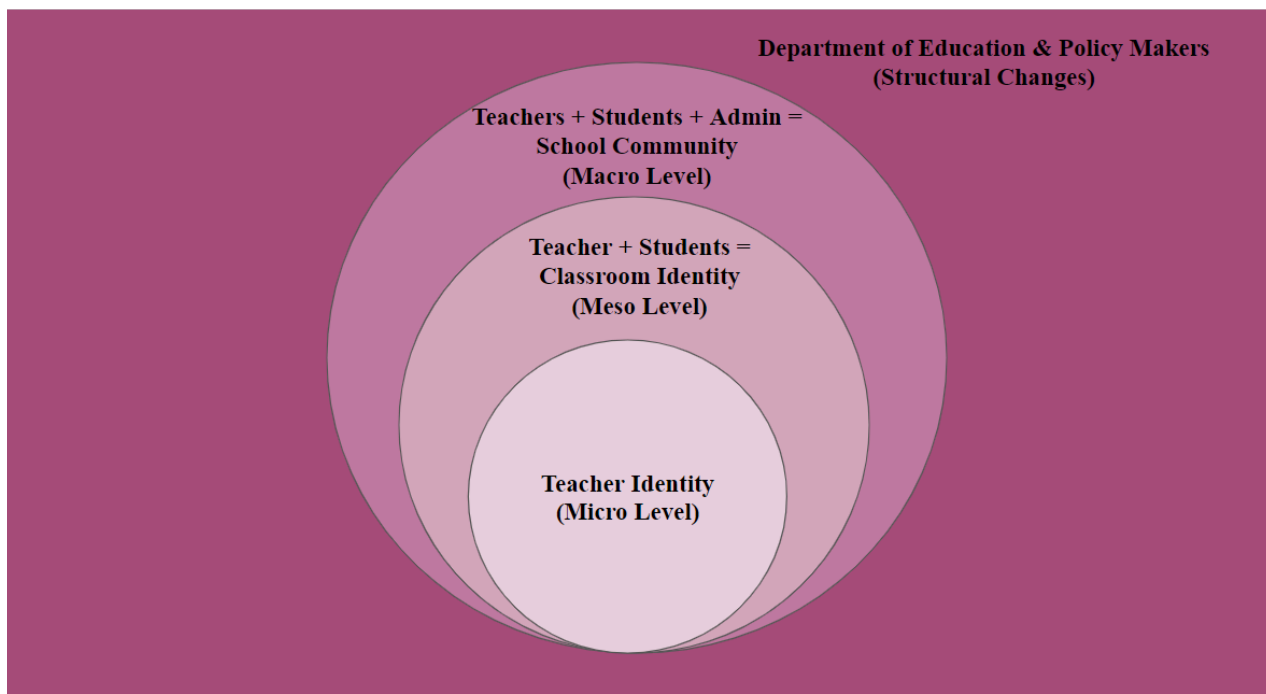
Similar to Harro's cycle of socialization, and Nakkula and Toshalis's (2010) theory of Co-Construction, understanding and honoring identity is not a linear process. It happens at the same time as content delivery, but in many different pieces throughout a particular period, in this case, a school year. To build a positive environment in the classroom, it is first essential to define identity. While there are many definitions of identity, Kayi-Aydur's lens helps frame my understanding of identity:

> Multiple presentations of self which are (re)constructed across social contexts and
> demonstrated through actions and emotions, [it is] multifaceted, dynamic, a site of
> struggle, and shaped by power relations between the individual and Others. (p.138)

This definition is multi-layered in describing actions, emotions, power relations, and social situations. By beginning to understand each category, I will be able to honor each student in my future classroom. I will first observe how these are present in a group of seventh graders, and analyze how their teacher considers these as she instructs the class. Although each classroom community is different, it is important to view this in an effective model to allow transferable skills in other classrooms.

As I continue to understand the development of young adolescents, it is important to acknowledge that emotional changes are substantial throughout this age group. Brighton (2007) unpacks four different categories of development in young adolescents so that middle school educators can more intentionally approach the needs of each student. In looking at the micro-level of identity, (Nakkula and Toshalis, 2010) young adolescents struggle with understanding their development. Brighton (2007) theorizes adolescents emotional development by explaining that:

Many young adolescents are concrete, operational thinkers, having not developed the cognitive ability to put themselves in the position of others. Therefore, they may have trouble interpreting their actions from the perspective of other people around them. (p. 55-56)

Although young adolescents are beginning to emerge in their cognitive thinking skills, they are not fully developed in their emotional intelligence. Brighton's theory on Adolescent Egocentrism is convincing when he states that to young adolescents, "The *imaginary audience* is the belief that everyone's attention is centered on young adolescents when they are in the presence of others" (p.2, 2007). Young adolescents believe that they are being watched at all times, causing mental draining by the end of the school day. By acknowledging and considering this in a classroom, I am considering the different ways in which instructors may speak to their students more deliberately and design lessons with that time of day in mind.

Young adolescents are fundamentally different from any other age group due to the immense amount of changes going on in their social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development. Nakkula and Toshalis (2010) define the concept of theoretical thinking as "the thought rooted in assumptions about the way things work- assumptions that are then tested in the real world, trial-and-error experimentation" (p.2). By now considering theoretical thinking it is important to consider that young adolescents are trying on different identities as they walk into middle school each day. As middle schoolers are trying on different identities, I need to try on different teaching styles so that my students have a safe learning environment.

Stepping outward at this macro-level, it is important to also consider the implications of labeling individuals based on their different identity markers. I agree with Kirk and Okazawa-Rey's (2012) statement:

Gender, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, sexuality, age, religion, dis/ability, culture, and

language are all significant social categories by which people are categorized by others.

Indeed, on the basis of these categories alone, others often think they know who we are

and how we should behave. Personal decisions about our affiliations, culture, and

loyalties to specific groups are also shaped by these categories. (p. 10)

By using individual's components of identity to oppress them, it is systematically breaking down

minority groups for larger, more historically dominant groups to stay in power. This is

problematic because it continues the cycle of socialization (Harro, 1986) and eliminates the

possibility of liberation. The way to eliminate this from happening, however, goes back to

understanding and honoring different identities at a micro-level. Many different identity

components play a role in these social settings, but for the sake of this study, I will be focusing

on two. As I unpack my own identity and conduct research I will be focusing on class and gender

specifically. Although all facets of identity are important, I am first examining the areas where I

have been marginalized (Lutrell 2015).

Social Class

Class is not simply one idea, but similar to identity, multiple factors must be understood

to not only name identities but also how they influence classrooms. Social class comprises three

important variables which include, power, wealth, and prestige. (Dottolo, 2023) Wealth is a lot

more than just considering how much money someone has in the bank, but rather an intricate

blend of what clothes someone wears, the types of cars one drives, and the overall resources to

thrive. Prestige relates to the respect one has in relation to the individuals around them. For

example, if a high-school graduate is applying to Harvard Law School, who their family knows

is an important factor. If someone in their family can make a phone call to someone they know in

admissions, this would certainly help plead their case to gain admission. There are unwritten rules of privilege for those who identify in the middle class and above, which all lead to the ability to go to a prestigious university like Harvard. Power relates to the standing one holds in society, for example, this may indicate the difference between being a teacher or a superintendent. Both have power over education, but the superintendent holds substantially more. Power, prestige, and wealth are all visible in society, and have a direct impact on students' learning in the classroom. I define myself as working-class which provides me with fewer opportunities than those in the middle-class and above.

Rebecca Klein's (2014) article discusses the implications of social class in correlation with participation in the classroom. The text states that students from working-class backgrounds are more hesitant to speak out in class. Students with at least one parent who went to a four-year college and holds a professional job set expectations for their child at a young age (Klein, 2014). By indicating a middle-class standing with power, the students are given the tools to speak out more in and outside of the classroom. By gaining the skills to ask questions, adolescents may grow in their confidence and ability to seek out more opportunities. With evidence to suggest that students from the working class are less likely to ask questions, it is important to teach these skills in the classroom and provide space to try on these identities not offered to their class.

To bridge the gap between social class differences, it is essential to spread awareness. bell hooks (1994) pulled from her experience as a working-class student in a university built for middle-class standards. She states "Class was more than just a question of money, that it shaped values, attitudes, social relations, and the biases that informed the way knowledge would be given and received" (p.180). Additionally claiming that women were at an economic disadvantage, hooks infers the inequity for women and working-class individuals at a collegiate

level. Inserting these ideas at a middle school level, I will embed these teachings into my content to provide a more just approach to education.

Gender

Lorber (2013) claims that everyone does gender whether it is conscious or not. As a woman, I have been socialized to think, speak, dress, and ultimately behave in a certain way. Women and men are socially constructed to take on a specific set of roles; women are in charge of the household and men financially support their wives and children. Lorber (2013) states,

> As a *structure*, gender divides work in the home and in economic production, legitimates those in authority, and organizes sexuality and emotional life. As primary parents, women significantly influence children's psychological development and emotional attachments, in the process reproducing gender… When gender is a major component of structured inequality, the devalued genders have less power, prestige, and economic rewards than the valued genders… Gender inequality- the devaluation of "women" and the social domination of "men"- has social functions and a social history. (p. 328)

By unpacking the social construction of power, it is easy to see that women are marginalized to be viewed as less than men. With fewer opportunities for advancement, and more passive roles in society, it is difficult for women to strive for independence in a world built for men. As I have conducted my study, I believe gender plays a role in the classroom and school structure. With this knowledge, I can provide a space for young women to emerge in their skills and seek out the possibilities for independence as they develop their own identities.

Gender oppression exists, and to create change one must understand where the injustices begin. Aulette and Wittner (2012) break down the social construction of gender into three different categories which are listed:

(1) At the individual level of social learning and psychological sex differences; (2) at the

interactional level of social relations in everyday life, and (3) at the level of the structural,

organizational, and institutional forces that constrain and shape action. (2012, p. 67)

In examining the individual level, babies are socialized to gender before even leaving the womb.

Parents anticipate their childrens' arrival with colors of either pink or blue, determining the

expectation of masculinity and femininity before birth. As the children grow into their socialized

roles in society, toys often associated with young girls include; barbie dolls, princesses, teachers'

gear, and even cooking sets. Young boys are socialized to appreciate military dolls, nerf guns,

cars, and even police and fire*men* gear. By deeming these toys more masculine or feminine,

children who want to play with toys outside of expectations are often ostracized and outcasted

(Aulette & Wittner 2012). These expectations are perpetuated in the classroom, as children begin

to socialize with each other, the cycle of gender repeats. It is important to name these disparities

in the classroom so that students can learn in a just setting. By beginning to shift these

pre-motioned beliefs, it will begin to create change and break this cycle. I have begun to reflect

on my socialization to gender, and am continuing to shift my ways of thinking. In doing so, I will

be able to not only construct a more just classroom but deconstruct the gender roles and

expectations of my students.

Methodology

My research is framed through a feminist lens. There is no universal set method or

guideline to conduct research with a feminist lens, which leads to collaborative and interpretive

methods for research (Maguire, 1987). Although there are many ways to define feminism,

Patricia Maguire's makes the most sense for my study. She writes,

> Feminism is (a) a belief that [women] universally face some form of oppression or
>
> exploitation; (b) a commitment to uncover and understand what causes and sustains
>
> oppression, in all its forms and (c) a commitment to work individually and collectively in
>
> everyday life to end all forms of oppression. (p. 79)

I believe that oppression and exploitation exist in the classroom, and through this study, I have

begun to understand what this means for my students. By first understanding its existence in the

classroom, I then researched possible causes. Finally, I examined oppression and discovered its

existence in a classroom. With the knowledge that I gained, I can commit to working towards

eradicating it in the classroom by providing a safer space for all of my students.

This study has allowed me to critically examine a classroom and myself using

inquiry-based research. My questions have stemmed from my curiosity about classroom identity

development through the co-construction of its students and teachers (Nakkula and Toshalis,

2010). Falk and Blumenreich (2005) define cognitive constructivism as "a process in which

individuals "construct" new understandings about the world through active engagement with

materials, ideas, and relationships. These new understandings are formed when prior knowledge

and experience connect with new information" (p. 5). Using a constructivist theory, I believe that

students and teachers construct new meanings through their interactions and mutual

understanding of one another (Falk & Blumenreich, 2005). It is because of this that I believe it is

important to first develop a better understanding of myself, and then get to know each of my

students so that I can create a mutually beneficial learning environment.

Reflexivity was considered throughout the study, not just at the end of data

collection (Dottolo and Tillery, 2015). Throughout each phase of my study, I questioned the

implications of my research questions and methods. I believe in learning as a recursive process,

therefore, it was essential to analyze privilege and marginalization in relation to my research question, participants, and cultural competency. I acknowledged and questioned my subjectivity as a researcher to create a more complex and efficient study (Dottolo and Tillery, 2015). Constructivism, feminism, formative analysis, and reflexivity have all influenced my ability to understand and code my data, which has ultimately allowed me to consider the power I may yield and share in a classroom setting.

Methods

My research is grounded through formative analysis (Falk & Blumenreich, 2005), and I considered the difference between the two analysis approaches; using both a priori and emergent analysis (Falk and Blumenreich, 2005). To structure my research questions and data, I had predetermined themes to search for within my observations and interviews that confirmed my previous bias. Falk and Blumenreich (2005) define this method as a priori analysis and state that these are "the themes or categories you will look for as you review your data " (p. 117). My a priori themes included class and identity, as those were the most familiar to me before entering my observations. As my research progressed, however, I noticed trends in my data that I had not initially considered such as gender and community. Defined as "emergent themes," Falk and Blumenreich state "Even when your research sub-questions are clearly defined and you are organizing your data around them, you may find evidence that just doesn't seem to fit in any category" (p. 117). By adding new categories in my coding, I was able to notice new influences on classroom development that will influence how I communicate with my students and reflect on my own identity as a researcher and educator.

School Overview

Context matters throughout this study, so for the purpose of my methods, I have provided the school's data. A seventh-grade English teacher, Betty Ray was eager to participate in this study. She teaches at The Beach School, a middle school in Hampton, Rhode Island, which includes grades five through eight. The school accommodates students who are local to the town of Hampton, but what sets this apart from other districts, is the space for students who reside at the military base near the area and the locals to Hampton.

Due to the uncertainty Military Families have with how often they will be in one place, the Beach School sets aside a certain amount of space in their school for these particular students. Ultimately, the class sizes are smaller, making the student-to-teacher ratio significantly less than other schools in the state. In Betty's seventh-grade English classroom, in particular, there are a total of three classes which range from twelve to twenty students. In addition to the small class sizes, there is an extra block throughout the day in which one class will repeat ELA for the day. This repetition rotates throughout the week and allows each content teacher extra time for Betty to work with her students on reading and writing. As my study has progressed, I have considered how the scheduling and class size impacts the student's learning and teachers' instruction.

Observation and Student Selection

This study took place over sixteen weeks, in which I have been conducting primary observations, individual interviews, and a survey to inform my selection and interview process. Throughout my first two visits to the school, I conducted my primary observations of the classroom setting and had students complete a Personalized Learning Plan(PLP) survey. Bray and McClaskely (2015) emphasize the importance of gaining a deep understanding of each

student in your classroom. A PLP is used to create a more diverse and insightful toolkit for

classroom instruction. The survey has been extremely useful for the purpose of my research

because the data has allowed me to be more deliberate in selecting a diverse group of students to

interview regarding class and gender. After gaining data from the survey, I was able to work with

Betty to choose three students for my interviews.

My first three observations consisted of high and low inference notes (Archer, 2016) in

the three different classes, 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3. I distributed a modified version of a PLP Survey,

where I gathered both qualitative and quantitative data on fifty potential participants in a

seventh-grade ELA classroom (Bray & McClaskley, 2015). I created questions to inquire about

the students' genders, social classes, learning preferences, and career aspirations. By

intentionally choosing students with different genders, family backgrounds, and learning styles, I

was able to choose three diverse students. After the first round of coding of the PLP, I chose

three students from class period 7.2, James, Taylor, and Ivy. Each varied in gender, career

aspiration, and family background.

Stevenson (2002) emphasizes "the goal of a Shadow study sometimes referred to as a

quasi-ethnographic procedure, is to enhance our understanding of a single youngster's or

teacher's life at school" (p 27). The first step in conducting a shadow study is to choose a focus,

and in this study's case that will be identity and student-teacher relationships. My research's

primary focus is to better understand my own identity and the identity of my students. I have

observed student and teacher relationships in a school so that I can critically examine my identity

and create positive relationships in my future classroom. In shadowing three students with the

same ELA teacher, I have made meaning of their different experiences. The reason that I chose a

shadow study for the students in addition to an interview, is because it is important to observe

how each student interacts with their peers in an ELA classroom. The shadow study has allowed

me to observe three different types of students in one class, and indicate how their identities

co-construct.

Data Collection

Qualitative research structures the interview process into three different sections which

include focused life history, details of experience, and reflection on meaning (Seidmen, 1998).

Seidmen (1998) proposes a three-series interview which includes; a focused life history, details

of past experiences, and a reflection on meaning. He suggests that each interview should be

ninety minutes long, however, this is not feasible with time constraints in a middle-school

classroom. By conducting thirty-minute interviews with Betty, I was able to follow the three

interview protocols. Beginning with Betty's focused life history, I asked her questions regarding

her family and past educational experiences. Within the second interview, I inquired about her

distribution of power in the classroom and teaching methods. In the third and final interview, I

pushed my questions to consider her reflection and future goals in the classroom.

Students were even more limited with their time available to participate, so with this in

mind, I condensed Seidmen's structure into one interview for thirty minutes. This limited the

amount of questions I was able to ask, but I was able to keep the three different components of

Seidmen's protocol for ten minutes each. By the end of each student interview, I was able to

reflect on the effectiveness of my questions and interviewing skills and strengthen them for the

next student. Throughout Seidmen's structure, he develops an interviewing procedure that

gradually gains qualitative data to develop the influence on practitioners' work in the future

(1998). By gaining this qualitative data, each round of my questions and data grew stronger.

Journaling and Self-Study

There is a strong relationship between teaching and learning within a self-study, and I have considered this throughout each step of my research (Clarke & Erickson, 2007). By conducting a self-study, I have named areas of identity in which I am privileged and marginalized, and through my experiences and stories, I can now name them. I kept a journal for three different portions of my research, the academic readings, my observations and data collection, and my own experiences and their connections to the content. Writing each entry has helped me to be a more reflective and deliberate educator, researcher, and individual.

<div align="center">

Analysis and Findings

</div>

Many factors influence an individual's ability to change and develop over time. The most prominent themes in my data that influenced one or a group of people's identity included gender, community, and power. My findings are broken down into these three categories, but it is important to not consider these as independent influences. Similar to the co-construction of identity through different people, different factors help to mold the identity of a teacher, student, classroom, and school (Nakkula, 2012). In structuring my findings in this way, I can tease apart these pieces, so that I may better understand how they are constructed together.

Gender

Students

Each student was asked who their favorite teachers and family members were, and after gathering each of their responses I found that each participant named a woman. Taylor (she/they/theirs) who is thirteen years old identified their mother as their favorite and closest family member stating,

> My mom, she's more of the emotional parent who I go to when I'm having trouble with stuff. Like social groups or having trouble with school. Um. And my dad is more for the Scouts and the activities I do… I am the only girl and I have three brothers. It's not fun sometimes but they're, they're nice brothers. (T. Orwell, 2023)

Taylor identifies their mother as the more emotional parent, meaning that she is more likely to confide in her about difficulties she is facing. Out of four children, Taylor is the only girl which could potentially indicate a closer bond between her and her mother. Taylor's father is on the scouts, and this matters because it perpetuates that status quo of gender roles. Lorber (2013) would claim that gender is socialized in parental roles, and in Taylor's case, her mother is taking on the expected role of emotional caregiver for her daughter. This is important to consider as I develop my teacher identity because gender is socialized; meaning students are coming from backgrounds where they will be more comfortable opening up to a female teacher. In my classroom, I want to be deliberate in creating a space where it is normalized for both men and women to openly embody every emotion. As I am creating my classroom community I want to disrupt the cycle of gender perpetuation, by embedding the potential damage of stereotypes and biases.

Thirteen-year-old James (he/him/his) can be identified in areas of power because of his gender and class. As a male, he has been socialized to speak up which is evident in his responses compared to Taylor and Ivy. Similarly to Taylor and Ivy, all three share an area of privilege regarding their class backgrounds. Each student has at least one parent who went to college accounting for their power and prestige, and lives in Jamestown which accounts for their wealth. Regardless of their gender and class, each student is marginalized due to their age. In my interview with James, he identifies his favorite teacher as Mrs. Smith from second grade. He

claimed, "She was really fun because she was inclusive and liked fun games all the time." By

using the term "inclusive" it is clear that James felt comfortable in his class, and remembered

this in seventh grade. James can reflect on his experiences as effective and ineffective in the

classroom. In identifying his power, James is a boy which gives him areas of privilege and

allows him to more openly speak. As a middle-class student, he can more effectively

communicate in the classroom (hooks, 1994). Because males are socialized to speak up and share

their power, James can share his words with less push-back. I am a female and a working-class

teacher, and can reflect on Jame's testimonies to enhance his and other student's positive

experiences in the classrooms. I will continue to create a space for James to speak freely but also

allow space for young women to be heard equally. By learning from students of different classes

and gender identities, I can adjust my teaching strategies to create an inclusive and diverse

approach to all students' education.

  In a follow-up question, I asked James to "Think about a teacher you don't like and what

they could do better. You do not have to say their name. Just think in your head. If there is

something you want to get off your chest, this is a space for you to do that." He responded with

the following,

> They need to just be easier with grading. Okay and like instead of doing everything at
>
> once in one period, I think they just need to like kind of like spread it out a little bit. Mrs.
>
> Castle gives us breaks and stuff and that's how I like to learn. She breaks in between and
>
> I have ADHD. I think it's like, it's undiagnosed, but my mom thinks so. I'll be shaking
>
> and shaking and get in other classes and get in trouble. Like, sometimes it's just hard to
>
> focus and I need a little bit of a break. That's how I feel. (J. Peach, 2023)

James can identify his experience with an ineffective teaching strategy for his learning. He was able to provide an example of a possible solution, through an effective method he experienced in Mrs.Castle's class. James opened up to me as a female teacher and allowed me to learn from his experience to become a better educator. James was honest and vulnerable in his response, and because I believe gender is a part of education, I can consider that one reason he was able to open up to me is because I am a woman. I can also look at how I asked him the question, where I gave him the "space" to share his experience. Because he felt comfortable speaking to me, he was able to share his experience and I was able to learn from him as a teacher. I can practice similar strategies in my questioning, as I develop my classroom in the future, and provide a space for students to reflect on their learning. In this instance, I was in a position of power due to my gender, so my goal as an educator will be to equally distribute this power in the classroom.

Each student answered the questions I presented to them in different ways, but universally all chose women as their favorite family members and teachers. Women are socialized to be more emotionally receptive (Lorber, 2013), and it is because of this that young adolescents are more comfortable in their presence. Taylor was able to articulate that she was more comfortable opening up to her mom than her dad, and James was able to reflect on a positive experience with a female teacher. As I continue to develop my identity as a female teacher, I can acknowledge that gender influences students' learning in the classroom. I will create a space that allows all students to share their voices. To disturb the perpetuation of gender, I will additionally create a space that normalizes every emotion regardless of gender. By cultivating a classroom that addresses students' biases with gender, I hope to end the cycle of gender in a group of middle school students.

Teacher

While observing the Beach School, I have considered how gender roles impact the administration and teachers at the school. Most of the teachers are female, while the principal is male. Although the principal opens up a space for the teachers to share their voices, he ultimately holds all of the power to create policy inside the school. I interviewed Betty Ray and questioned her about this power dynamic throughout her experiences in school and now as a teacher.

Growing up, Betty lived with her mother who is a secretary for a lawyer, her father who sells lab equipment, and her younger brother. I asked her when and how she knew she wanted to be a teacher, and she responded,

> Before kindergarten, I really wanted to be an anesthesiologist because of my
> grandmother. I was really obsessed with her growing up, but as soon as I started
> kindergarten, I was obsessed with school. I knew ever since then I wanted to be a
> teacher… I also have a cousin around my age and when we were younger we used to play
> this game called Baby Care Inc. (B. Ray, 2023)

Betty knew that she wanted to be a teacher since she began school, and she recounted various examples of practicing such as baby care inc. Her love for school pushed her to be an exceptional student, and this eventually led to her becoming a profound educator. By having dolls available to her to create this pretend daycare, the idea of working with children was socialized at a young age (Lorber, 2013). Similar to her students' Betty's primary influence growing up was a woman, which reiterates the socialization in two different age groups. As I have observed Betty's skill as an educator, my identity has been shaped through her testimonies and teaching strategies. By noticing that teaching is a primarily female-dominated field, I will open up my students' thinking

to all different job fields. I will spread awareness of the possibilities for every career, regardless of gender. I hope to teach my students that no job should be considered masculine or feminine.

After conducting the second interview with Betty, I was curious how many pauses were exchanged between the two of us with the words like, so, and um. Within a twenty-five-minute interview frame, there were one-hundred-forty-two pauses between our questions and answers. Speech can be considered one of the universal forms of oppression a woman faces (Maguire, 1987). Myers (2013) reiterates that women have been socialized to pause and consider what they are about to say, whereas men are permitted to speak their minds. She states,

> As my grandmother became frail and angular her
>
> husband swelled to red round cheeks, round stomach
>
> and I wondered if my lineage is one of women shrinking,
>
> making space for the entrance of men into their lives,
>
> not knowing how to fill it back up once they leave.
>
> I have been taught accommodation.
>
> My brother never thinks before he speaks.
>
> I have been taught to filter. (lines 14-21)

Women have been silenced, whereas men have been taught to just speak. Similar to my interview with Betty, the two of us have so many pauses in our dialogue. A potential reason for this could be because of the need to thoughtfully consider what we were saying. In a world that caters to the words of men, it makes it that much more important for women to have space for voice. As I am deliberately building my identity as an educator, I aim to consider my speech and gender. By practicing speaking in the classroom and creating an equitable space for women and men, I aim to end the oppression of speech inside my classroom.

Additionally, I asked Betty how the activities she did in college influenced what activities she took a role in as a teacher. She responded with the following,

I also did Cross-Country and Track in college, and am still involved with that in our school today. The guy in charge really isn't willing to give it up, so they call me a Cross-Country Groupie. I go to all of the games to support the students, and I think it is really important for them to feel supported by teachers in the school. (B. Ray, 2023)

Betty expressed a passion for Cross-Country and has a large interest in becoming the coach of her middle school team. The male coach is not willing to share or give her the position, but he does allow her to do the majority of the work. This means that Betty supports the team and attends their meets, but she does not hold the position of coach. Because I believe that women are oppressed, I also believe that part of the reason the coach is a male is because of gender. He has been given a position of power, and there is a possibility he is trying to "hold onto it" so that he continues to have that power. Although he holds this power, Betty remains an active participant on the team. As I continue to develop my identity, I can consider Betty's role on the team. Although she is not the captain, she continues to push for involvement on the team. This allows me to understand that even though women are oppressed, I can advocate and push for things that matter to me in the classroom.

In specifically asking Betty the difference between boys and girls speaking in the classroom she said the following,

I think something that I am bad with is calling out the boys for talking in class because they're so loud. Their literal voices are so loud. The girls I don't notice as much because they're much quieter. That's definitely if someone were to watch me on I'm sure it would be a thing that is unfair that I do… I think I sometimes give more credit to the boys and

the girls are like 'what are you doing?' when it really is more equal in terms of behavior."

(B. Ray, 2023)

In this instance, Betty identifies a time in her classroom when the girls are given more power than the girls. She is self-aware that injustice is happening, and constantly tries to correct her actions. Betty has articulated her beliefs of wanting equitable treatment of boys and girls, and my beliefs directly align with hers. Because I believe in this just treatment, I will try to be deliberate in my own discipline in the classroom. Similar to Betty, I will acknowledge that boys' voices may be louder than the girls, and be deliberate in choosing when I call out students.

Class

Students

I have identified class through a triangulation of power, prestige, and wealth (Dottolo, 2023). In considering the students' backgrounds, I have examined their responses to surveys, and interviews, the clothes they wear, their participation in the classroom, and their individual experiences. The students live in an area where the median income per household is over six figures (Census, 2022). Each has volunteered to participate in class discussions, and for the most part, does not hesitate to answer. The majority of students wear name brands such as Lululemon, Nike, Polo, etc. Those who do not wear these brands typically wear hoodies to colleges such as The University of Vermont. Through these observations, I can infer that a majority of the students come from a middle-class background and above.

Ivy (she/her/hers) is a thirteen-year-old student and has been summering in Hampton for as long as she can remember. She lived in New York City during the school year, but a few years ago moved to Hampton full-time. She prefers Hampton to New York, due to the beach and the less-populated town. In my interview with Ivy, I asked her to "Tell me about a tradition in your

family. What makes this tradition special to you?" She responded, "Every year we go to Stowe,

Vermont from Thanksgiving to March and we've done that for like a while now… I race um and

my brother does backcountry stuff and we homeschool there" (I. Potter, 2023). Ivy and her

brother have a private tutor for the four months of the year they miss from school. Multiple

factors play a role in Ivy's wealth within this example. To begin, her family can relocate for four

months, meaning that there is less of a chance that both parents work during this time. Second,

her family can afford a private tutor and a second home which costs a substantial amount of

money. Lastly, skiing is an expensive sport which in this instance is affordable to them. Through

her wealth, I can identify that she is middle-class which has implications for both of us inside the

classroom. I come from a working-class background and have to address my own biases of those

in a higher class. My job as an educator is to not make Ivy feel bad because of her privilege but

to skillfully make her aware of what she has that other people may not. By allowing Ivy to

understand her privilege, she will be able to understand her own identity.

In considering Ivy's power and prestige she states that her dream job is to be a

professional ski racer. When I asked her about this she said, "I wanna do it because I really like

going super fast and being aggressive going down… I practice three times a week which I think

also helps a lot… I want to go to the World Cup and maybe the Olympics" (I. Potter, 2023). In

this example, Ivy gains power through her ability to ski. Skiing, The World Cup, and The

Olympics are all prestigious. Through her family's support and her dedication, she can pursue

these dreams. For Ivy's identity, this means that she is privileged to be allowed to ski, but she is

also hard working by practicing multiple times a week. For my identity, I must put aside my

prior biases of middle-class and skiing. Together our identities will both grow. I can help Ivy

become aware of some of the privileges she holds, and she can help me understand all of the

hard work she puts into this activity.

   A part of Ivy's background can be identified through her learnings from her family, but

there are other influences at play. Within her survey, Ivy stated that soccer was another one of her

biggest passions. Upon asking her what made her like it so much she stated,

   I first started when I was like five or six but it was kind of just for fun. Then I stopped for

   a little while, and when I moved here I started again. I was nine and I just started again

   because like my friends were doing it and it seemed fun then. Now I do it because it's one

   of my favorite sports and it's super fun. (I. Potter, 2023)

Ivy can feel included in soccer through her conversations with other girls in the class, and the

support of her parents. Through my observations of the girls on the soccer team, they tend to

stick close together and choose each other as partners during class time. Soccer, similar to skiing,

requires resources both monetary and emotional from Ivy's parents. Supporting Ivy's interest in

sports is beneficial to her growth and ability to become a part of a bigger community. Ivy can be

classified as middle-class and for other students that share similar experiences, it may potentially

be easier to make friends and communicate in class. As a teacher, it is important to identify

social class so that I may support students differently. For someone in Ivy's position, I may focus

on checking in with her on the content during her time away. For someone who is not as

involved in the school as Ivy, and that could potentially come from a working-class background,

I may want to focus on their involvement in class discussion (Klein, 2014).

Self

At the beginning of this study, I struggled to understand the difference between the middle class and the working class. Once I began to understand the concept in-depth, I wrote a journal entry in February of 2023. It stated,

> *I am now able to confidently state that I am working class. I am the first in my family to go to college. With this came many difficulties in my education. I had no guidance when applying to schools, completing a FAFSA, or applying for scholarships. I was typically the quiet kid in school because I was afraid I would get an answer wrong. When my friends were going on family vacations, I was lucky to have my mom home a day from work. These are all the products of living in a working-class household. I am not ashamed of my background, but instead, I am proud to use it to become a better educator... By gaining a better understanding of where my students are coming from, I can better navigate how to cultivate a space that honors the identities of all of my students. For those of a different class background than me, such as middle class, I will be sure to confront my own biases and set out new methods to be more reflective and responsive as an educator. (A. Messier, 2023)*

Social Class can be harder to distinguish than other factors of identity, and because of this, I think it is essential to understand it within both myself and my students. By understanding my students' I will have a better sense of their backgrounds which can deliberately impact my instruction. For those of middle-class standing, it will be important for me to address and consider my own biases toward those with a higher wealth, power, and prestige than myself. I will additionally help students understand their privilege, so that they may better understand other backgrounds. For those of a working class, it will be important for me to provide support

with things students might be struggling with such as speaking in the classroom or having access to some tools that other students already have. By helping students with different social-class backgrounds gain a better understanding of themselves, I hope to create a more equitable and safe learning community.

Power and Community

Communities are built with different positions of power within them. While observing the Beach School, I noticed two main communities at play. At a micro-level, there are communities built within each classroom. At a meso-level, the school in itself is a community, with different layers of power, the highest being the principal. Through my research, I have examined how much power is shared within these different communities and how this impacts the overall environment at the school.

In the Classroom

Throughout my student interviews, I asked each participant to think about a class that was hard for them to learn in. I asked them to consider a way the teacher could have made it easier for them. James responded with the following,

> The hardest lessons I have learned are in history and math. In social studies she doesn't really give us, like, she doesn't really teach or give us choices like Mrs.Ray does, but she kinda just tells us what to do. She tells us what to do and that's that. In math, it's just hard for me to pay attention. There's a lot of stuff all going on at once, and I can never just take a second… My favorite teacher ever was Mrs.Suzie because she was really inclusive and gave us breaks and stuff.

James explains that he struggles with ADHD and it is sometimes hard for him to focus in class. He says that by giving him options, breaks, and being inclusive he learns more easily. When

considering the words "choice" and "inclusive" he is describing the overall environment and power that he has felt while entering the classroom. One potential way that he could have felt included was by being able to decide what activity he wanted to complete. This allowed him to work at his own pace and made him more willing to complete the work. As I am intentionally developing my identity, I must acknowledge that sharing my power as a teacher is essential to building community in my classroom. To be deliberate, I will consider what students' needs are on an individual level and include areas where students can choose their activities, for example, creating a choice playlist.

When asking Betty how she shares her power with her students in the classroom she responded with the following, "I guess it's not as much that I share power, but reduce the intensity of my power. I like to hear their perspectives, how they're feeling, how they're doing. And choices in terms of projects and stuff. I try to offer them choices as much as I can" (B. Ray, 2023). Similar to James' response, Betty considers allowing the students to have choices as part of sharing her power. When she responds with the ways she is reducing her power and intensity, I believe that she is essentially sharing it with them. By giving students a voice and sharing their stories, she is considering their feelings. This is significant to her overall learning community because it offers a more welcoming classroom that students are more prone to learn in. As I am developing my own identity, I aim to give my students a voice in their learning. I will intentionally do this by offering surveys to students and providing choices in the classroom.

Limitations

This study has been limited to one teacher and three students who are in one classroom at the same school. The school is in a suburban area and is primarily made up of students who come from middle-class backgrounds. This provides limitations on my data that include those of

different class statuses, and schools that are rural and suburban. Due to the time restraints of this

study, I was only able to go to one school. If I were to continue my research, I may consider

opening up my research in both an urban and rural school. This would open my data to examine

three different classrooms and schools. I conducted only one interview with each student, which

limited the amount of one-on-one time I had with each. Had I been able to conduct more than

one interview, there may have been a stronger level of comfort for both myself and the students,

which may have led to more in-depth responses. My skills as an educator and researcher grew

throughout each interview and observation I conducted, so if I were to continue this study my

learnings would be pushed further. Intersectionality examines identity through many factors

including gender, class, race, ethnicity, ability, etc. (Rosenblum & Travis, 2016). Each of these

factors is important and should be considered in my teaching practices, however, this study

exclusively looks at identity through the lens of gender and class. This study is limited to these

two facets of identity.

Implications

My Identity as a Researcher and a Student

This project has broadened my perception of what it means to be a researcher. Before this

research, I had considered data to exist in a dominantly quantitative way, and I now believe what

is most important is the stories within qualitative data. By coding data using qualitative methods,

I look for patterns but can consider their implications in a classroom, myself, and society. Since I

began and owned this project, I can't look at the world without seeing gender and class

everywhere I go. I used to be afraid to analyze something without having a clear idea of what I

was looking for. Now that I understand that learning takes place in the mess, I am open to

straying away from my own biases to seek out knowledge and ultimately be willing to shift my

beliefs and understandings. (Cook, 2009). Another lesson that has been essential to my research is that I am not alone and having a critical friend helps to make research more clear and effective for those not directly involved in it.

I used to think of myself as a strong student, but my confidence was lacking in comparing myself to others. I struggled to use my words clearly and effectively and oftentimes became defensive of my background. I felt embarrassed during some classes in the past because I did not always grasp the material as quickly as others. I now know that each person holds their strengths, and problems with testing and college stem from systemic issues within class, gender, race, ability, etc. This project has helped me to understand difficult articles and readings, and made me more confident in asking for help when I do not understand. Before this, I had considered getting a master's but was unsure if I was capable of handling it. I am now confident in my abilities as a student and plan to pursue a master's and a Ph.D. and to allow this to be the first of many research projects I conduct. As a working-class student, I feared the possibility of even completing college, never mind an honors project. My confidence has grown with my knowledge throughout this study. To connect this back to feminist theory, women are typically silenced and until this project, it was hard for me to share my voice. Now that I have gained the knowledge, skills, and practice to succeed, I am confident in my abilities to continue growing as a learner.

My Identity as a Teacher

What does identity development look like in three different students in a middle school?

My education courses at Rhode Island College have taught me to acknowledge and appreciate that students are all coming from different backgrounds, but this study has allowed me to consider this at a deeper level. By interviewing and observing Taylor, James, and Ivy I can confidently say that even with similarities in class, the three students require various tools to

succeed in education. Taylor views the world in a more hands-on and creative way and excels in English and Art. For students who prefer to learn through hands-on and visual approaches, options for creativity in their work allow them to feel more included and excited to participate in class. James views school as a means to become successful and he has no trouble articulating that, yet struggles with focusing. For students like him, it is beneficial to offer breaks in between assignments and break down learning at a more comprehensible level. Ivy maintains a level of privilege and power due to her social class background, however remains marginalized due to her gender and inconsistency at one school. For students like her, it is beneficial to check in with her and offer support in transitioning back to school full-time. These are three different examples of situations that may occur when I am a teacher, but there will certainly be many more that I have not yet researched. It is important for me as a teacher to consider the methods I utilized throughout this project so that I can support all my students and provide equity in my future classroom. Maguire (1989) defines feminism by first explaining that women face some sort of oppression. Through this study, I have found instances where female teachers in the school, and young adolescents (both male and female) have faced forms of oppression. By next considering what causes this oppression, I have investigated various instances of it being through levels of power. Through my interviews and observations, I now have a set plan to begin my commitment to ending oppression within the classroom and school (Maguire, 1989).

What are the theories and motivations of a middle-level educator as they plan their daily lessons?

Betty has proven to be very intentional as she considers her student's identities, and reflects on her practices after each lesson. After each period she consistently altered one section from the class before, to make the material more effective and engaging for each of her students.

She told me that as much planning as she does, there is always room for improvement. The

world is constantly changing, and in order to keep up with it, she constantly allows herself room

to grow. From her I learned that it is important to grow, but also important to be gentle with

yourself. As a ten-year teacher, she says that her skills have and will continue to grow each year.

As a woman she is marginalized and sometimes shut out by powers of authority. Through her

awareness, she is an advocate for not only women's rights but those of all different identities.

> *How do the identities of both the student and the teacher in a classroom make a*
>
> *difference in the overall student engagement and learning in the classroom?*

Betty and her students' identities co-construct with each other, and she is constantly

seeking out ways to grow with her students. She offers her students a voice in their learning and

considers their feedback as she plans out each lesson. She begins the day with a check-in so that

she is aware of their feelings and energy level for the day. Through my analysis of the

community, her intentions and James's beliefs on her structure aligned with each other. As Betty

is teaching her students English, she is learning from them the best ways to approach instruction.

She constantly asks for their feedback and is the definition of a reflexive practitioner.

> *What does this mean for me as a professional middle-level educator who is developing*
> *her own identity?*

Throughout this study I have learned so much about myself, student needs, and

intentionality needed to be an exceptional teacher. As I am entering the field of teaching, I feel

confident with the fact that there is so much that I still do not know. Through this study, some of

the most important concepts I've learned include curiosity, intentionality, identity, and

reflexivity. In the field of teaching it is essential to be curious and it is because of this that I will

always question and search for ways to improve my teaching. I will be deliberate in continuing

to develop my identity alongside my future students and colleagues. Now that I have a deeper

understanding of my identity regarding class and gender, I will continue to push my learning on those alongside others such as race, ability, etc. Finally, I will continue to be reflexive through each step of my teaching and constantly make changes for the better. This study has helped to shape me into who I am becoming, and it is just the beginning of my story…

APPENDIX A

EMAIL SAMPLE:

Good afternoon, (Participant's Name),
My name is Autumn Messier and I am a student at Rhode Island College studying English, Secondary Education, and Middle Level Education. I am working on an Honors Project with the topic of identity and young adolescent development. Through this project, I have been in contact with Betty with the hopes to conduct a study in your school. I know that she has spoken with you about the study but my hope is to spend time learning with Betty and 3 students. I am wanting to use this time to learn how to intentionally enter the profession as the best middle level educator I can be. To provide some background context, my study will consist of me observing and interviewing three students in Betty's class throughout a full day of classes. I will also be conducting observations and interviews on Betty, in order to gain an understanding of her teaching style and communication with the students. It is my understanding that you are on board with this project, and I greatly appreciate the opportunity to learn from your school and community!

 I am emailing you today in hopes that I may gain written approval for this project. As a part of Rhode Island College's protocol, one of the necessary steps to begin my research is written approval from the principal of the school involved. If you would like to further discuss the project and my expectations, I would be happy to come to the school and/or have a phone call. I look forward to hearing from you soon and want to thank you for your willingness to think about supporting my learning.

Thank you again, I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Autumn Messier
amessier_8210@email.ric.edu

APPENDIX B

PLP SURVEY

Getting to Know YOU!
Please fill out the form to your best abilities! If you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, feel free to skip them!

Last Name: First Name:

What are your pronouns?
    A. she/her/hers
    B. he/him/his
    C. they/them/theirs
    D. Other:

My favorite class in school is _____.

I am good at _____.

I need to get better at _____.

One unique or special thing about me is _____.

Outside of school, something I like to do for fun is _____.

What do your parents/guardians do for a living?

What is your dream job?

What is your favorite place to eat?

How long have you lived in Hampton?

Check the words that best represent you…

(13) When I talk to someone new I feel _____.
    Very Scared 🙁-- Very Excited 🙂

    1   2   3   4   5

(14) When a teacher does _____, I feel more comfortable at school.

(15) Would you be interested in being a part of a project that will help a college student learn more about middle schoolers?

APPENDIX C

STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Personal History
   1.1. What is something you want me to know about you?
   1.2. Who is your favorite family member? Tell me about a time the two of you shared together.
   1.3. Tell me about a tradition in your family. What makes this specific tradition special to you?
   1.4. Who has been your favorite teacher in school so far? What did they do to help make learning easier for you?
   1.5. Tell me about a time that one of your teachers taught a lesson you did not like. How could they have done something differently to make the lesson more enjoyable?
   1.6. In the survey you filled out, you said you really liked to _____. Can you tell me about how you started to get into it?

2. Current Experiences
   2.1. How does technology influence how you communicate with your friends? Do you talk more face to face or online? Which do you prefer?
   2.2. In the survey you filled out, you said that you like when teachers _____. Can you tell me about a time you experienced this?
   2.3. You said that your favorite classes are _____. Can you tell me what makes this class the most enjoyable for you?
   2.4. Which class do you find the hardest to learn in? Tell me about something you think would help you learn more easily.

3. Future/ Reflection
   3.1. In your survey response, you said that you want to be _____. Can you tell me about the job and what you think you would like about it?
   3.2. You said that you think you could get better at _____. What is one thing your teacher could do to help you? What is one thing you think you could do to improve these skills?
   3.3. What is one question you have about college/ for me?

APPENDIX D

TEACHER INTERVIEW: SECTION ONE (FOCUSED LIFE HISTORY)

1. Family History
   1.1. What do both of your parents do for a living? Did this influence your career path?
   1.2. Tell me about a tradition in your family. Consider what made it special, and how that influences traditions in your own family today.
   1.3. Did you have any family members close to your age growing up? If yes, what was your relationship with them like?
   1.4. What did a typical weekend in your family look like growing up?
   1.5. Tell me about a time in your own adolescents that stuck with you. What was memorable about this experience, and how has it influenced your adult life?

2. School History:
   2.1. Where did you attend school for your K-12 education?
   2.2. I know you attended The University of Rhode Island for under-graduate degree, and pursued a Master's Degree. What was that degree in, and how did it influence your identity as a teacher?
   2.3. We briefly talked about you always knowing you wanted to become a teacher, but did you know that was for English?
   2.4. Were you involved in extracurricular activities in your college career? What activities were these?
   2.5. Tell me about an experience you shared with another teacher or professor that still influences your adult life.

APPENDIX E

TEACHER INTERVIEW: SECTION TWO (CURRENT EXPERIENCES)

1. Building Relationships with Students:
    1.1. In our last interview you describe yourself as a "teachers pet". How do you modify your instruction and teaching for students who don't fall under this category?
    1.2. Tell me about a time where a student was really successful in an activity. How did you provide positive feedback, and how did that influence the students' performance class after?
    1.3. How do you share your power in the classroom with your students?
2. Collaboration & School Supports:
    2.1. Think back to a time when a student was having behavioral issues for an extended period of time. How did you collaborate with your team to come up with strategies for the student?
    2.2. How does the leadership in your school either allow or prohibit your creativity in the classroom?
    2.3. What activities and events are you involved in that help to build the community of the school. (ex: school dances, potlucks, etc.).
3. Timing:
    3.1. Tell me about a time where you prioritized one assignment over another. How did you intentionally make this decision?
    3.2. One thing I am really nervous about in the classroom is timing. How have you developed time management strategies in the classroom for yourself?

APPENDIX F

TEACHER INTERVIEW: SECTION THREE (LOOKING FORWARD)

1. Power
   - 1.1. In our last interview, I asked: "How do you share your power in the classroom with your students?" I said I would bring it up again this week, and would love to know if you had thought about it anymore.
   - 1.2. In our last interview you mentioned "The Honest Poem" in giving students more power in the classroom. Going forward, what other ways do you think you may share this power?
   - 1.3. In which ways do you see power shared within your school community?
   - 1.4. How do you define power in relation to a classroom setting? Identity?
   - 1.5. Tell me about a time you learned from your students as they were learning from you.

2. What if?
   - 2.1. Tell me about one thing you would change about the grouping of your classes.
   - 2.2. Tell me about one thing you would change about the scheduling of your school.
   - 2.3. What if you were the principal? What is one thing you would change about the structure of your school?
   - 2.4. Tell me about a time you didn't agree with an admin decision in the school? What did you do?

3. Looking Forward:
   - 3.1. Tell me about one goal you have for the rest of the school year for your students.
   - 3.2. Tell me about one goal you have for the rest of the school year for yourself.
   - 3.3. What is a new strategy, tool or resource that you want to incorporate into your classroom?
   - 3.4. What do you want to tell me as I move forward in my own identity development?
   - 3.5. What question do you wish I had asked you?

References

Adams, M., Blumenfeld, W. J., Castañeda, C, DeJong, K.. R., Hackman, H. W., Peters,

  M. L., & Zúñiga, X. (2018). *Readings for diversity and social justice*. New York:

  Routledge.

Adichie, C. (2009). *The Danger of A Single Story:* <u>*The danger of a single story - TED*</u>

Anderson, G. L., Herr, K., & Nihlen, A. S. (2007). *Studying your own school: An educator's*

  guide to practitioner action research. Corwin Press.

Aulette, J. R., & Wittner, J. (2014). *Gendered worlds*. Oxford.

Bray, B. & McClaskey K. (2015) *Make Learning Personal: The What, Who, WOW, Where, and*

  Why. Corwin Press.

Brighton,K. (2007). *Coming of age:* <u>*The education and development of young adolescents.*</u>

  Westerville, Ohio: National Middle School Association.

Cook, T. (2009) *The purpose of mess in action research: building rigor through a messy turn.*

  Educational Action Research.

Dottolo, A. (2023) *Defensiveness Playlist. Rhode Island College.*

Dottolo, A & Tillery S. (2015) *Reflexivity and Research.*

Falk, B., & Blumenreich, M. (2005). *The power of questions: A guide to teacher and student*

  research. Heinemann.

Harro, B. (2000). *The cycle of socialization. Readings for diversity and social justice*

hooks, bell (1994) *"Confronting Class in the Classroom" Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom.* NY: Routledge

Kirk and Okazawa-Rey (2019) *Identities and Social Locations.Readings for Diversity and Social Justice.*

Klein, R. (2014). *Working-Class Kids Ask Fewer Questions in Class, And Here's Why.* XX : The Huffington Post.

Lorber, J. (1994). "*Night to His Day": The Social Construction of Gender. Readings for Diversity and Social Justice.*

Luttrell, W. (2000). *"Good Enough" Methods for Ethnographic Research.* Harvard Educational Review.

Maguire, P. (1987). *Doing participatory research: A feminist approach.* Amherst: Center for International Education, University of Massachusetts.

Myers, L. (2013) *Shrinking Women.* Wesleyan University.

Nakkula, M. & Toshalis, E. (2010). *Understanding youth: Adolescent development for educators.* MA: Harvard Education Press.

Pishghadam, R., Golzar, J., & Miri, M. A. (2022). *A new conceptual framework for teacher Identity Development. Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*.

Ride report card - home page. RIDE Report Card - Home Page. (n.d.). https://reportcard.ride.ri.gov/

Rosenblum, K.E & Travis, T.C. (2016). *Framework Essay.*

Stevenson, C. (2002). *Teaching ten to fourteen year olds.* MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Seidman, I. (2019). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the Social Sciences*.

U.S. Census Bureau quickfacts: United States. (n.d.).

https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045222

Vagle, M. (2012). *Not a stage! A critical re-conception of young adolescent education*. NY: Peter Lang.