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Moral Professional Agency: A Framework for Exploring Teachers' Constructions of Professionalism Within a Democratic Space

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Moral Professional Agency: A Framework for Exploring Teachers' Constructions of
Professionalism Within a Democratic Space

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
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by

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"I could live on your love and nothing else if I had to."
-Rhett Miller

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Abstract

Despite long-standing debates about the nature of professions and professionalism related to teaching, little consensus has been reached due in large part to an ever-changing political climate and a number of competing ideologies and interests (Bair, 2014; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996). This lack of consensus fosters variable expectations of teachers, creating opportunities for the generation and implementation of initiatives that ultimately control and undermine teachers' work (Ingersoll, 2003). While the quality of our nation's education system depends on teachers' capacity to have professional input regarding their work, concepts of teacher agency and professionalism remain ill-defined, and few studies explore teachers' experiences in spaces where they are asked for such input.

This constructivist study examined teacher agency and professionalism, given the ideal of democracy and the reality of neoliberalism. Utilizing agency theory and participatory democratic theory, this study sought to explore teachers' perceptions of their professionalism and agency by co-constructing knowledge with 18 members of the Richmond Mayoral Teacher Advisory Council (MTAC). This study took place over seven months and included seven focus group interview sessions, two MTAC meeting debrief sessions, and multiple writing prompts focused on teachers' narratives of their professional experiences. The study revealed several themes related to teachers' professionalism, particularly teachers' focus on student-centered, morally-grounded views of their work. This study's iterative inquiry process culminated in the development of a Moral Professional Agency framework that may serve useful in future constructivist work with teachers regarding their professional work.

Keywords: *professionalism, teacher agency, democratic spaces, moral professional agency*

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

"In a healthy profession, all those who engage in its practice are professionals…To have a great educational system, we must build a respected profession" (Ravitch, 2013, p. 277). Most reading the above quote would likely agree with its premise; In order to provide every child with a quality education, we must first ensure that those providing the education are professionals. What would likely be contested, however, are definitions of the terms profession and professional, as well as ideas of how to build a respected version of either. These contestations inform several questions that lay at the heart of this project. How does the operationalization of professionalism impact teachers' work? How do teachers understand their professionalism? How do their experiences in democratic spaces impact the development of their identity as professionals?

Despite long-standing debates about the nature of professions and professionalism related to teaching, little consensus has been reached due in large part to an ever-changing political climate and a number of competing ideologies and interests (Bair, 2014; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996).[1] This lack of consensus fosters variable expectations of teachers, which creates opportunities for the generation and implementation of initiatives that serve to control and undermine teachers' work (Ingersoll, 2003). It stands to reason that in order to create a truly great educational system, we must work to build a respected teaching profession, and this

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[1]It is difficult to generalize one approach to addressing professionalism, as even since *A Nation at Risk* (1983) was issued, the ways in which professionalism are viewed have looked different depending on the political and organizational entity responsible for the approach.

necessary work first requires thoughtful consideration of how we define professionalism while respecting the "uniqueness of education as an institution and the unique qualities of teaching as a profession" (Gunzenhauser, 2013).

Statement of Problem and Rationale for Study

We are experiencing a moment in our country's history when teachers are emerging as activists. At the time of writing this chapter, across the country, teachers are striking, marching to state capitals, walking out of classrooms and schools, confronting elected officials, and commanding a national debate calling for their local governments to adequately and appropriately invest in public education (Balinget, 2018; Burnette, 2018; Goldstein, 2018; Reilly, 2018). Teachers have boldly stepped into the spotlight and onto trending news feeds demanding that their voices be heard. This action is not something to be taken lightly; West Virginia, Oklahoma, Arizona, Kentucky, North Carolina, Colorado, and Washington, sites of teacher action, are all right-to-work states, where teachers' associations are historically weak due to a lack of collective bargaining power, meaning teachers are jeopardizing their jobs by taking a stand to defend the institution of public education (Balinget, 2018; Reilly, 2018). So, why are teachers willing to risk their livelihood?

When interviewed about the reason professionals eventually rise up, Robert Bruno, a professor of labor relations at the University of Illinois, described that "what really generates this explosion of resistance among professional workers is when they feel they're the last line of defense between the public they serve and others who would threaten the professionalism of their work" (Scheiber, 2018). Through a review of the literature, combined with my personal experience as a teacher, I argue that many activist teachers have reached a point, collectively,

where they must confront an ethical dilemma between their professional values and the educational experiences they are charged with providing students. Recent literature explores some of these predicaments through teachers' resignation letters (Dunn, 2015, 2018; Dunn & Downey, 2017; Santoro, 2017), narrative analyses (Dennis, 2015), and interviews with teachers (Santoro, 2018) that illustrate a variety of stories all involving similar challenges. We have reached a crucial moment where many teachers are choosing to leave their profession because the ethical dissonance between their teaching credo and how they are being expected to teach is too great.

Prior to, but certainly also often in response to, recent teacher action, two parallel education crises have dominated the headlines of newspapers and social media threads. First, there is a monetary crisis, which presents both accounts of teachers unable to survive on a teaching salary, and examples of severely underfunded schools and classrooms. In the local school division in which I live, teachers often cannot attend after-school events because they work a second job at the end of the school day to pay their bills. Also, recently, a previous colleague[2] posted a Donor's Choose project to fund his personal purchase of classroom chairs. Because his school only had cracked ones to supply his students, and when supply requests were made to the district, the response was that the district did not have a furniture line in their budget (Ross, 2019). Second, there is a teacher shortage crisis, or as some scholars argue should be

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[2] While my full statement of positionality is included in Chapter 3, I recognize the necessity to include a brief overview of my experiences from which I draw for this study. I taught in an urban public-school system for ten years, during which time I became increasingly frustrated with the conditions in which my colleagues and I were teaching. I began speaking out as an individual, and receiving negative responses from my administration, both at the school and district level. I ended up leaving teaching after a year of intimidation and what some might call bullying.

called a teacher exodus crisis, which details startling national teacher shortages and contributing attrition rates. At the start of the 2018 school year, more than 100,000 classrooms were staffed by an instructor who was not fully qualified to teach, and 90% of these open teaching positions were created by teachers who left the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2018). These narratives could be understood as a cause-and-effect relationship, the underfunding of schools and teachers' low wages instigating waves of teachers to leave the classroom. However, rather than cause-and-effect, I argue that these narratives are both effects of a systemic and problematic national trend in public education. Over the past several decades, PK-12 education in the United States has been significantly altered by a series of accountability movements focused on the standardization of education, and this in turn has created a complex and challenging context for various groups within education, including teachers (Boyte & Finders, 2016; Ravitch, 2013; Santoro, 2018).

Reforms initiated in response to the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk (ANAR)* (National Commission for Excellence in Education)*,* and codified by both the 2002 signing of No Child Left Behind and its 2009 reauthorization as Race to the Top, while possibly well-intended, have largely failed to accomplish their goals, and instead often have endangered public education in this country (Boyte & Finders, 2016; Day, 2002; Dunn, 2018; Guzenhauser, 2013; Ravitch, 2016; Santoro, 2018). *ANAR* was grounded in the notion that our education system was failing and that as a result our nation was falling behind developed countries (Endacott, Wright, Goering, Collet, Denny & Jennings Davis, 2015). Reporting that "the professional working life of teachers [was] on the whole unacceptable" (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005), *ANAR* effectively planted doubt in the public's mind, leading them to question the effectiveness of our public

education system, with a specific focus on PK-12 educational practices and the teachers

delivering them (Chung & Kim, 2010; Endacott et al., 2015). Concerns regarding student

achievement prompted increased conversation around school performance and the need for

education reform. This initiated a long-standing debate about teaching as a profession, marked

the beginning of decades worth of obsession with performance on socially-constructed

accountability metrics, and widely popularized the rhetoric of teacher-blaming in the United

States (Day, 2002; Gunzenhauser, 2013; Helsby, 1999; Pearson & Moomaw, 2005; Ravitch,

2016).

Since *ANAR's* release, reform communities and policymakers at all levels have been

engaged in debate about how to fix our ailing schools, with a specific focus on how to

professionalize teachers' work, as teachers are viewed as the primary vehicles for reform

initiatives. Professionalization models at the national, state, and local levels have been impacted

by neoliberalism, a body of economic beliefs that favor market-based competition and

privatization (Apple, 2001; Giroux, 2004; Gunzenhauser, 2013; Dunn, 2018). Neoliberal tenets

and ideologies have been influential in driving educational discourse and decision-making in this

country (Gunzenhauser, 2013). Dunn (2018) explains how in a neoliberal educational state,

parents and students represent the consumers, and instruction, and thereby teachers, represent the

product. The idea is that education necessarily must be standardized to ensure that all students

are receiving the same quality instruction. Further, through market competition, the best schools

will survive, forcing failing schools to close. Neoliberal reform efforts in the world of education

have manifested in the privatization of public schools due to a suspicion of public services, and

have resulted in a lack of investment in our nation's public education system (Apple, 2001;

Dunn, 2018). This financial neglect has caused both educational crises—monetary and teacher shortage—mentioned earlier, which emerge as perennial challenges to education.

When viewed together, these challenges underline an ethical dilemma with which teachers are increasingly faced. Working in facilities that have been ill-maintained and sometimes therefore literally crumble on classroom floors, using materials and textbooks that are decades old and present inaccurate information as a result, and being treated as a commodity versus a professional, are manifestations of the tension between teachers' personal philosophies of what teaching should be, and the actual educational experience that they are able to provide their students. Santoro (2018) explains that "dissatisfaction rooted in the condition and status of the [teaching] profession is inseparable from concerns about students" (p. 87), but she goes on to rightly assert that we have reached a point in our current educational moment where "it is necessary to reframe the moral dimensions of teachers' work in terms of caring for the integrity of the profession, not simply caring for students" (p. 87). This project follows in that spirit; Engaging with understandings of professionalism is a necessary step towards caring for the teaching profession itself.

Statement of Purpose

Public schools are physical manifestations of our country's democratic ideals. Therefore, they are also spaces in which our greatest ideological differences are made visible (Labaree, 1997). Our schools have historically served as battlegrounds for both social and political disputes, and as stewards of our educational institutions, teachers themselves have been subjects of national debate, so much so that Goldstein (2015) titled her book, *The Teacher Wars: A History of America's Most Embattled Profession*. While in many of these disputes,

professionalism is contested space (Day, 2002; Hilferty, 2008; Johnston, 2015; Sachs, 2003; Smaller, 2015), decisions about the teaching profession and teachers' work are largely made by policymakers and others in positions of power rather than teachers themselves (Sachs, 2001; Goldstein, 2015; Ravitch, 2013). Hilferty (2008) describes professionalism as a social construct that is defined and redefined by ever-changing education theory, policy, and practice. Many see the current trend of neoliberal education policy as counter-productive to the formation of a healthy conceptualization of the teaching profession and largely works against the realization of professionalizing teaching in any manner that would benefit our public schools (Anderson & Cohen, 2015; Torres & Weiner, 2018).

Much of the extant literature on teacher professionalism explores reasons that teachers leave the profession (Dunn, 2015, 2018; Dunn & Downey, 2017; Santoro, 2017), or the multiple challenges faced by teachers who stay (Ingersoll, 2003; Torres & Weiner, 2018). However, there is an empirical gap in research on how teachers who stay in the profession enact their agency, and an even larger gap in research on the ways in which teachers understand and negotiate their professionalism when provided with democratic opportunities to participate (Bair, 2014; Helsby, 1996). Further, several scholars have pointed out the shortage of empirical research on teacher professionalism, and specifically how it is constituted in the field of education (Bair, 2014; Evans, 2008; Swann, McIntyre, Pell, Hargreaves, & Cunningham, 2010; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005). Bair (2014) reminds us that "[s]uch a lack of attention to professionalism in the field of education is problematic, for without an understanding of what professionalism consists of, it will be difficult to figure out how it may be influenced" (p. 30). Sachs (2003) suggests, and as the literature on professionalism in Chapter 2 supports, seeking a fixed position on whether

teaching is a profession is futile as professionalism has always been a changing concept,

therefore this study did not seek to answer that question. Instead, it sought to contend with

several of the questions from the beginning of this chapter by working with teachers to construct

knowledge of their professionalism as a means of moving beyond simply *understanding*

teachers' experiences to *empowering* them as professionals. Further, this study sought to provide

space for teachers to engage with not only their individual experiences and constructions of

professionalism, but also to consider the concept of collective professionalism through their

constructions with their colleagues. Finally, this study sought to explore teachers' professional

identity development through their participation in it.

Context and Conceptual Framework Overview

Considering the current educational moment when teachers are increasingly enacting

their agency and confronting attacks to their profession in very public ways, this study used

participatory democratic theory and agency theory to engage with teachers' experiences in order

to construct knowledge of teachers' understandings of their professionalism within a democratic

space. Under the umbrella of professionalism, these two concepts were used to frame this study's

engagement with teachers' professionalism, as well as to answer its research questions. In this

section, I begin with an overview of the context of this study, Richmond's Mayoral Teacher

Advisory Council (MTAC). Then I provide a brief explanation of how professionalism served as

the overarching concept for this study. Finally, I introduce both participatory democratic theory

and agency theory through a discussion of how they informed this inquiry.

Richmond's Mayoral Teacher Advisory Council as Context

Richmond's MTAC formed out of a conversation I had with Mayor Levar Stoney over

coffee in January 2018, following a series of events during the two years prior. Education was a major issue in Richmond's 2016 mayoral election, with school board, city council, and mayoral candidates focusing their platforms on issues related to the education of Richmond's children. Mayor Stoney developed a platform that earned him the title of "Education Mayor," which some might argue won him the election; However, pretty quickly after Mayor Stoney took office, he was met with push-back on one of his first education initiatives, the Richmond Education Compact. Richmond Public Schools' (RPS) school board, seven out of nine who were serving their first term, had just ousted the superintendent, Dr. Dana Bedden, and had appointed a search committee charged with selecting the next superintendent.[3] The community was embroiled in debate over the way in which Dr. Bedden was removed, and were additionally concerned about the non-representative nature of the superintendent search committee.

Several prominent members of the education community—including an organization that I was, and continue to be, a part of—spoke out in solidarity against the untimeliness of the proposed Compact. Teachers were upset that it seemed the stability of the school system was of little concern to elected officials eager to put their mark on the city. For the next several months, Mayor Stoney and I had a somewhat strained relationship as I had spearheaded the press conference calling for the mayor to postpone any action taken prior to the installation of the school district's leadership (Kruszewski, 2017). However, we ran into each other at a holiday party in 2017 and I suggested we have coffee and clear the air about our educational goals and priorities. He agreed, and we scheduled a meeting for the beginning of the new year. By this time a new superintendent, Jason Kamras, from Washington D.C., had been selected, sparking fears

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[3] I was asked to be a member of the search committee, and was required to sign a non-disclosure agreement prior to our first committee meeting.

that privatization of our schools was the next step. To many, Mr. Kamras represented a reform ideology that was largely anti-teacher, and this caused a great deal of anxiety within teacher circles in which I was a part. During the meeting with Mayor Stoney, he and I talked about the absence of teachers' voices in important decision-making processes and how important it was for policymakers to have insight from teachers about their work, as well as understand ways in which they are impacted by the budgetary and policy decisions handed down from above. He and I spoke honestly about our perceptions of the current educational context and how we believed we could address the major issues. Out of that meeting came the idea that I create a mayoral teacher advisory council so that he could hear first-hand from teachers about issues impacting their work, and their students' lives.

So, for my externship experience during my PhD program, I conceptualized, designed, recruited, and recommended teachers for, Richmond's inaugural MTAC. I began working on the application and selection during May and June of 2018. I met with RPS School Board members and Richmond City Council members to discuss my vision for the council and to receive feedback on how to ensure that the council did not cross over into the governing roles of either body. I received feedback from five School Board members and two City Council members. The application went live in the middle of June 2018 as a Google form that was open to all RPS teachers, and out of 56 applicants, 18 teachers were selected to be members of the inaugural MTAC in Richmond.

The mayor's office expressed a focus on diversity, and specifically diversity representative of the teaching force in Richmond. The MTAC ranged in experience from first year teachers to those who had been teaching for 32 years. 58% of the MTAC were teachers of color and 63% were women. 53% of the council lived within the RPS school division, with six of

the nine districts represented. Seven out of the nine school districts were represented by schools in which MTAC members worked. There were two Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) teachers, six elementary school teachers, three middle school teachers, six high school teachers, and one Career and Technical Education (CTE) teacher. There were five exceptional education teachers representing each level (preschool, elementary, middle, and high). Three English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers and one teacher endorsed in ESL were on the council, and there were five teachers who graduated from the Richmond Teacher Residency (RTR), a program that utilizes a residency teacher preparation model focused on preparing teachers for urban classroom settings, and geared towards teacher retention.

The MTAC was extremely diverse, almost exactly representative of the teaching force in Richmond. From 2017 data provided by RPS' Superintendent's office, broken down by male and female teachers, 39% of female RPS employees were white, and 61% were teachers of color. The MTAC was made up of 36% white, female teachers and 64% female teachers of color. From the same 2017 data, 39% of male RPS employees were white, and 61% were male teachers of color. The MTAC breakdown was 42% white males, and 58% were male teachers of color.

The MTAC met for the first time in August 2018 as a group, without the mayor's office present, in hopes of getting to know each other and establishing their identity as a council. Teachers shared several challenges they faced in their schools, and then discussed ways in which the mayor's office, considering his lane of governance, could support teachers' work. In the end, the council emerged with three main priorities[4], which they took to their first meeting with the mayor in October 2018. Meetings were held every other month and the goal was for the council

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[4] The MTAC's three priorities were: teacher recruitment (focused on teachers of color) and teacher retention, advocacy for a dedicated funding stream, and to secure free bus passes for schools to provide to parents who may lack transportation.

to establish an initiative or objective to accomplish before August 2019. During their last meeting in June of 2019, Mayor Stoney and the MTAC decided that MTAC teachers who were staying in Richmond for the next school year would continue to serve the next year as advisors to the mayor's office. This study's context was bounded by members of the MTAC, and discussions and knowledge construction were grounded in the direct work of the council.

Professionalism

Professionalism served as the overarching concept in this study as I was primarily interested in constructing knowledge of how teachers understand it. I was also interested in how engagement in a democratic space impacts teachers' development and enactment of agency, which I viewed as related to teachers' professionalism.

For over a century, teachers' professionalism has been the subject of research studies. Hargreaves (2000) outlines the development of professionalism using four historical ages: the pre-professional, autonomous, collegial, and post-professional, and identifies characteristics and implications for each, specific to teaching as a profession. He and a number of other scholars explore the increased challenges teachers face with regards to their agency (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Helsby, 1996; Robertson, 1996; Santoro, 2018; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1996). Day (2002) posits that although "reforms have changed what it means to be a teacher as the locus of control has shifted from the individual to the system managers…'being a professional' is still seen as an expectation" (p. 681). This can be interpreted as acknowledgement that although teachers no longer maintain control of determining what it means to be a teacher, they are still expected to accept and embody that which is externally decided for them. In some cases, this may present a problem for teachers, as policymakers' determinations of what it means to be a professional may

not align with teachers' versions. In Chapter 2, I present an overview of the literature on

professionalism, and argue that currently there is a disconnect between the literature on

professionalism and professionalism in practice. While the literature presents, and allows for,

tensions in discourse about professionalism, in practice, there appears to be a singular way of

being a professional that often contradicts what teachers feel makes them one (Torres & Weiner,

2018). However, scholars have called for, and continue calling for, teachers to reclaim their

professionalism in response to the impacts that reforms have had on the teaching profession

(Dunn, 2018; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996; Sachs, 2003; Santoro, 2018). Despite the lack of

definitional clarity regarding professionalism, key to this study was research indicating that

professionals, in the case of this study, teachers, possess core moral purposes and ethical codes

which arguably are being challenged in today's educational context (Day, 2002; Hansen, 1995;

Pels, 1999). In order to fully unpack the challenges that cause teachers to leave the profession,

we must first attempt to understand how teachers understand and experience their

professionalism. Therefore, professionalism served as the multi-faceted focal concept for this

study. Teachers' constructions of their professionalism are largely missing in the field, even

though, and possibly because, they have the potential to reclaim space occupied by researchers

and policy-makers.

Participatory Democratic Theory

The concept of participatory democratic theory was evident in much of John Dewey's

philosophizing about individuals' engagement with democracy, and in many ways expanded

upon the fundamental Deweyan notion of the "public." Dewey's conceptualization of a public is

central to the entirety of his philosophizing about the world, and played a significant role in this

study. Stitzlein and Rector-Arranda (2016) explain that a proper interpretation of a Deweyan

public entails citizens, in community, coming together to "construct a common good…[and]

actively work together to form and transform public institutions, practices, and policies" (p. 167).

The authors also describe that a public is formed when, based on shared interests or problems,

people work to "construct, question, or revise the common good together" (p. 167). Higgins and

Knight-Abowitz (2011) enhance this explanation with their argument that public should be

understood as a verb that involves an act of forming communities by recognizing various

perspectives about common concerns and then working through problems conjointly. Because

the MTAC was founded on an action-oriented principle, and the members both shared interests

and were committed to collaborating toward solutions, it aligned with views of what constitutes a

public. Examples of publics in the literature include communities of practice (Lave & Wenger,

2001), various learning communities (Masuda, 2010), teacher activist groups or organizations,

(Quinn & Carl, 2015), and small publics (Stitzlein & Rector-Arranda, 2016).

While I have presented the term "public" to refer to sites of working together to construct

a common good, for the purposes of this study, I proceed using the term "democratic space"

instead. My reasoning for this alternative terminology is fairly straight-forward; Dewey's

conceptualization of "public" tends toward openness, and implies an unrestricted inclusivity.

However, for this study, the boundaries of inclusion were more specific. I define a democratic

space as: a site, or collective, focused on engagement in discourse and action with others with

shared interests to improve living and working experiences and conditions. Rather than a simple

rewording of the definition of a public, a democratic space also carries with it an obligation to

participate and the terms of participation are suggested by the nature of the socio-political

structures in which it is contextualized; The democratic space for this project was bounded in ways that Deweyan publics are not. This boundedness included not just who was likely to participate, but also the nature of the participation.

This study considered Richmond's MTAC as its democratic space. The MTAC teachers each applied to be a part of the council, and during selection interviews, many of them articulated their desire to participate in what could be defined as a democratic space, including that they wanted to use their unique perspectives to identify problems and work through them together, and to be in community with other teachers to transform public education in the city. They also expressed their desire to move beyond the school context and into a more public sphere to impact change. I recognized and acknowledged from the outset that teachers on the MTAC may have been members of other groups, organizations, or entities that may be considered democratic spaces, but for the purposes of this particular inquiry, protocols for the debrief session and focus group interviews were limited to events and conversations within MTAC meetings and interactions. By drawing the boundaries in this way, I engaged in several conversations with committee members and others as to whether this inquiry should have qualified as a case study. I made the decision to not categorize this project as a case study. My rationale was that case studies are particularly useful when the phenomenon under study cannot be separated from the case itself. I argue that professionalism exists independent from the MTAC, or even membership as an MTAC teacher. Teachers had their own set of professional experiences and constructs prior to their membership on the council, and therefore, their professionalism *could* be separated from the site itself. Additionally, rather than being interested in the MTAC as a case in itself, I was more interested in the role that the MTAC served as a

democratic space. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the MTAC served as merely the site, or democratic space, for exploring and understanding professionalism, which served as the phenomenon under study.

Višnovsky and Zolcer (2016) describe "Deweyan democracy [as] participatory through and through" (p. 67). The authors go on to describe the core of participatory democracy being "the idea of a communitarian educational institution in which all participate as equal and free agents in order to share their experiences and competences with the aim of mutual growth" (p. 71). Participatory democratic theory emerged in the 1960s and is based on the premise that people learn to participate *by participating*, drawing on the Deweyan concept of an educative experience, as well as the notion that through increased participation, democracy is strengthened (Pateman, 2012). Additionally, the act of participating is educative in that it supports an individual's ability to consider others' viewpoints, including collective perspectives (Bartch, 2016). According to participatory democratic theory, opportunities for participation must be created; They are not pre-existing, nor do they spontaneously appear (Pateman, 2012). The MTAC exemplified a participatory democratic context in several ways. First, it established space for equal participation among MTAC members with the goal of sharing educational perspectives. Second, the MTAC encouraged members' participation, thus increasing their engagement in, and education of, democratic processes. Reclaiming the contested space of professionalism requires participation, and as such participatory democratic theory was well-suited for this study as teachers have purposefully engaged in a group with participatory means to move toward professional ends.

Agency Theory

Biesta and Tedder (2007) describe agency as both "a central concept in modern educational theory and practice…[and] a key notion and issue in contemporary social theory" (p. 5). Social theorists use human agency theory to refer to an individual's capacity to act on their own free will and to make choices independent of direct influence (Dunn, 2018) while Bandura (1989), from a more psychological approach describes it as a "capacity to exercise control over one's own thought processes, motivation, and action [whereby] people can effect change in themselves and their situations through their own efforts" (p. 1175). In educational research, the definition of agency, like professionalism, is variable, depending on the specific term being used. For example, Pantić (2017) describes *teacher* agency as "involv[ing] a commitment to pursue a sense of, at least partly self-determined purposes informed by the underlying beliefs about their professional roles" (p. 220). However, Lasky (2005) defines *professional* agency as "the notion that professionals such as teachers have the power to act, to affect matters, to make decisions and choices, and take stances in relation to their work and professional identities" (p. 1). While a lack of consensus regarding the definition of agency certainly has implications for decisions made about teachers' work, in-depth discussion of the variety of ways in which agency is operationalized in the literature is beyond the scope of this study. For the purposes of this inquiry, I used Lasky's (2005) definition of professional agency in conjunction with Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) chordal triad of agency theory as components of my conceptual framework.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998), with their framework, the chordal triad of agency, view a person's agency as impacted by their past experiences, projections toward their future, and interactions with the present. The authors are clear that in any concrete situation, these dimensions—called the iterational, projective, and the practical-evaluative, respectively—are all

present, but do not necessarily play equal roles (Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015). As a

result, according to Biesta and Tedder (2007), individuals may enact more or less agency at

different times. This conceptualization of agency, informed by various dimensions at fluctuating

levels of consciousness provides a valuable lens through which to consider agency. Using my

career as an example, these three dimensions capture the many factors that came into play when I

was faced with a challenging situation. At times, I allowed past experiences to deter me from

speaking out or challenging a top-down decision, while there were also times that past

experiences equipped me with courage to stand-up. For this study, the chordal triad of agency

provided the structure for teachers to share experiences that informed their sense of

professionalism and to enact their agency.

Research Questions and Overview of Methodological Approach

Taken together, the three concepts discussed above—professionalism, participatory

democratic theory, and agency theory—created the context and provided the framework for in-

depth, structured discussions about professionalism and agency enactment. These concepts were

also fundamentally meaningful to me because of my experiences in the classroom, as a graduate

student, and in my community work. Creating an opportunity for teachers to play a more

participatory role in their profession through involvement with the MTAC was important to me

even before conceiving of this study. Teachers' work, and their sense of fulfillment in it, has

always been interesting to me, and my work to develop the MTAC was initially motivated by my

desire to elevate teachers' voices in decision-making conversations about their work. However,

very quickly after the MTAC started meeting, I realized what a unique, and powerful context it

was for exploring larger issues of teachers' professionalism and agency, topics of conversation in which teachers aren't regularly engaged. Therefore, providing an opportunity for teachers to discuss these concepts, and to ground research and scholarship in their voices also became important.

Two research questions guided this study. Research Question #1 was "How do teachers participating in a democratic space make sense of their professionalism?" Aligned with this study's conceptual framework—participatory democratic theory and agency theory—and existing research related to each, Research Question #2 asked "How does teachers' participation in a democratic space impact their sense of, and ability to enact, agency?" To answer these questions, I engaged in a constructivist inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rodwell, 1998) involving a series of seven semi-structured, focus group interviews, two debrief sessions, and writing prompts with the MTAC teachers focused on their understanding of professionalism. I used extant literature, as well as personal experiences and perspectives from my decade in the classroom, to develop specific, targeted interview questions that were incorporated throughout a hermeneutic circle in debrief sessions and focus group interviews. At the beginning of each session, I presented initial themes and the MTAC teachers would discuss whether they felt they were relevant, or worthy of a deeper conversation. Based on their feedback, the interview questions and debrief session protocols were expanded in-person, and in the moment as teachers provided their input. Themes were generated through ongoing interactions between myself and the MTAC teachers for the entirety of the study. This approach was very Deweyan as there were a series of transactions between data collection and analysis, and, as will be shared in the discussion section of this paper, each individual engaged in this project emerged changed.

This qualitative study, at a macro-level, sought to construct knowledge of how teachers understand their professionalism in democratic spaces. Participatory democratic theory is rooted in Dewey's concept of the public, where agentic individuals use their experiences to collectively work toward a common good and growth of the whole (Višnovsky & Zolcer, 2016). As neoliberal initiatives and policies encroach upon the teaching profession, there are fewer and fewer opportunities for teachers to engage in democratic discourse and processes pertaining to their work (Stitzlein & Rector-Arranda, 2016). At a micro-level, this study engaged with teachers' experiences participating in a space designed to increase their access to democratic processes as a means of constructing knowledge with teachers. This inquiry also studied how teachers' opportunities to engage in participatory, democratic processes impact their ability to enact agency in their professional lives.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation sought to advance understanding of how teachers' experiences and perceptions of their professional work are impacted by their participation in democratic spaces designed to elevate their voices, and increase their involvement in discussions about education. This research also attempted to expand knowledge regarding the challenges, opportunities, and potential offered by the creation of democratic spaces, particularly spaces that put teachers in conversation and action with individuals whose decision-making impacts their work.

In this first chapter, I have provided a glimpse into my personal experiences and perspectives that led me to the research questions and design of this study. I have also offered a broad overview of the concepts and theories informing this study's framework. Finally, I have briefly discussed the study design and methods, as well as the potential contribution of this

project to expand research in the field.

In Chapter 2, I provide a review of the literature related to professionalism, agency theory, and participatory democratic theory—three concepts that form the framework of this research, and introduce several key terms related to the study.

Chapter 3 focuses on the constructivist study design used to answer my research questions. I describe and justify the strategies used in data collection, data analysis, and presentation of findings, as well as explain the standards of rigor used to evaluate a constructivist project.

Chapter 4 includes an explanation of the conceptual framework that I created based on the analysis and interpretation of debrief session transcripts, focus-group interview transcripts, and the MTAC teachers' responses to written prompts, as well as a report of the thematic findings.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the findings, as well as implications for research, practice, and policy. While the findings of this study are specific to its unique context, and not intended to be generalized, I provide considerations for use in educational communities and within education-adjacent structures and systems. Finally, I recommend directions for future research based on the study's findings.

Summary and Goals of Study

Establishing intellectual, practical, and personal goals prior to conducting qualitative research is of critical importance (Maxwell, 2009). Combined, these goals illustrate a study's contribution to the deepening of both the researcher's and the field's understanding about a phenomenon for both an individual researcher and the field-at-large. Not only does establishing

these goals make explicit the justification for a study and its specific worth, but it is also an act of

reflexivity that can offer insight into various motivations that may inform an inquiry (Finlay,

2002). In this section, I describe my intellectual goals for contributing to the knowledge base, my

practical goals for application in the field, and my personal goals in which much of this work is

rooted.

Intellectual Goals

The conceptual framework that I employed in this study brings together two theories—

participatory democratic theory and agency theory—that are largely disconnected in existing

literature, under the umbrella concept of professionalism. Dewey's participatory democratic

theory offers a lens through which we can explore spaces and opportunities for engagement in

various publics to affect change, and agency theory provides us with the idea that we are capable

of acting upon our free will and exercising control over our actions. Unfortunately, in my

experience, these opportunities and capacities are not available to many teachers, either by nature

of their inexistence, teachers' unawareness, or teachers' hesitance to engage with them. I do not

suggest that this is the fault of any teacher organizations not doing enough in this area, nor do I

intend to discount the important work currently being done by various groups. I do, however,

acknowledge that due to increasing pressures placed on teachers, they may lack the time,

knowledge, or interest that would lead to their engagement in such spaces. Thus, teachers may be

left to navigate their professional experiences either disengaged or disempowered. This study

sought to share knowledge of what happens when openings for participatory democracy *do* exist

and teachers *do* participate, and contributes to the limited, yet slowly emerging, empirical

research base on teacher professionalism and agency (Biesta et al., 2017; Dunn, 2018, Santoro,

2017). Additionally, this study has the potential to generate important understandings of how participatory democracy and agency are related to teacher professionalism, and the implications for this in future studies related to teachers' work.

Practical Goals

While I am interested in the potential for theory generation and adding to the research base of the field, I am a practitioner at heart, and was therefore more motivated by the potential for the practical application of this study's findings to affect change in the teaching community. My goal is that the study in and of itself, through knowledge construction, and the subsequent deepening of participants' conceptualizations of their own work, leads to positive change. My hope is that by engaging in this study, all of the individuals involved, including myself, emerge more conscious of, and better equipped to engage with, challenges to their professionalism than before. An ambitious practical goal is that this study informs adjustments and allowances within systemic educational infrastructure so that teachers' professional lives are enhanced. This study offers potential promise to the creation of both spaces and supports that acknowledge a holistic view of teachers' professionalism by encouraging their participation in educational discourse and decision-making processes. Perhaps more realistically, I am driven by potential for policymakers within the context of this study to use its findings to make informed decisions that support teacher retention. Additionally, my goal is to raise awareness of teacher spaces and that teachers will be encouraged to seek out spaces where their voices and experiences are valued, as well as to take advantage of the opportunities they can provide.

Personal Goals

This project is extremely personal to me. Not only was I a public-school teacher for a

decade, but I also continue to work with, and organize with teachers in the community to effect change. In my conversations with teachers, I am constantly saddened to hear their expressions of self-doubt and despair: they feel as if they are not "good" teachers anymore, they express a sense of hopelessness that things will never change, and harbor disillusionment in our nation's public school system. These sentiments cut me to the core, and my hope is that the work I am doing will, in some way, make the professional lives of teachers, my colleagues and friends, better. I want public education in this country to serve its students and communities with respect and dignity, and I believe that begins with treating teachers as professionals.

CHAPTER 2: Review of Literature

This review of the literature addresses several areas associated with teacher professionalism. To begin, I discuss ways in which neoliberal trends currently impact public education, and teachers specifically, in order to establish the context of this study. Next, I present an overview of extant professionalism literature, with a brief attention to its history grounded in work on the professions, followed by an exploration of how professionalism is studied in the literature, various frameworks used to understand teaching as a profession, and the challenges and tensions that professionalism models present for teaching. Then I describe the agency theory literature, including its history, key terms, and rationale for why this theory offers a practical lens through which to explore teachers' participation in democratic spaces. After that, I present participatory democratic theory as useful in research on teachers' efforts to reclaim their professionalism and agency. To conclude, I discuss how these central ideas coalesce to form this study's conceptual framework and its research questions.

Reform and Public Education

While neoliberalism is not a primary topic of this study, an inquiry designed to address teachers' work would be incomplete without an understanding of how various policies and reforms have impacted, and continue to impact, educational spaces and therefore teachers' work. In fact, much of the recent literature on professionalism related to education includes studies contextualized in reforms that have substantially increased since the turn of the century and transformed what is expected of teachers (Dunn, 2018; Dunn & Downey, 2017; Endacott et al., 2015; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Stone-Jonson, 2014). Much research explores the many ways neoliberal policies inform teachers' work, thus, for the purpose of this study it may follow that

neoliberal policies also impact teachers' understandings of their professionalism.

Although various initiatives and programs were designed throughout the 20th century to address educational practices, none had the staying power of policies and practices born out of *A Nation at Risk* (ANAR) (1983) (National Commission for Excellence in Education). ANAR*, published in the early 1980s, declared that "more and more young people emerge from high school neither ready for college nor for work" (p. 12) and leveraged its findings to support an already shifting paradigm regarding public education practices. Endacott et al. (2015) use Mehta's (2013) work to outline three fundamental assumptions of this newly emerging educational model:

> (1) education should serve the primarily economic function of preparing students for the workforce; (2) public schools in the United States are failing to produce the educational success that is imperative for national economic success; and (3) schools must be held solely accountable for producing academic outcomes as measured by externally administered tests. (p. 414).

This prioritization of educational purposes ushered in various reforms that appealed to both citizens' fears of the United States losing its position of global power, as well as the political ideal of individual freedom and decision-making (Harvey, 2005). ANAR painted a stark picture of our nation's education system, depicting it as incapable of educating and preparing a future workforce, and thereby increasing the likelihood that the United States would be "relegated to Second World Status by the First World education systems of competitive economic juggernauts in Western Europe and Asia" (Guthrie & Springer, 2004, p. 22). While multiple studies indicate that any correlation "between rankings on standardized tests and national economic success is either negative or too weak to be considered significant" (Endacott et al., 2015, p. 415), public

education discourse continues to be dominated by themes of economic success, reform, and accountability (Endacott et al., 2015; Mehta, 2013; Meyer & Rowan, 2006), and a national narrative emphasizing the impact of public schooling on the economy continues to circulate (Endacott et al., 2015; Harris, Handel, & Mishel, 2004; Tienken & Orlich, 2013). It is from these themes that neoliberal thought seemingly naturally seeps into educational reforms.

Proponents of neoliberalism posit "public institutions as potential threats to market freedoms and believes that the unregulated market should be the organizing force behind decisions made in the personal, political, social, and economic domains" (Endacott, 2015 summarizing Sloan, 2008, p. 415). A primary tenet of neoliberal thought is the ideal of liberating individual and entrepreneurial freedoms, and therefore, many reform efforts involve huge investments in initiatives and agendas promoting individual choice and deregulation (Barkan, 2011; Saltman, 2012; Mehta, 2013). The neoliberal agenda has been embraced by both of our major political parties in the United States due, in large part, to its focus on an individual's freedom to choose (Giroux, 2004; Endacott et al., 2015). The public's continued acceptance and reinforcement of neoliberal approaches privilege private interests and goals over public ones, and has contributed to what Endacott et al. (2015) describe as an "unprecedented federalization of education policy, a willingness to define student achievement exclusively by standardized test scores, and the belief that all of the nation's social problems can be solved by improving schools alone" (p. 415). While it is beyond the scope of this project to discuss the numerous implications associated with a neoliberal social approach, it is of central importance to understand ways in which neoliberalism as an educational approach impacts teachers' work and views of professionalism.

Impact of Neoliberal Thought on Teachers' Work

There are several ways that teaching and learning have been impacted by the tenets of the neoliberal agenda, made evident by an exploration of existing literature. Robertson (2007) claims that "neo-liberalism has transformed in both predictable and unpredictable ways, *how* we think and *what we do* [original emphasis] as teachers and learners…" (p. 3). The pervasive nature of neoliberal practices in schools has created an environment in which neoliberalism is accepted as a "hegemonic…mode of discourse" (Harvey, 2005, p. 3) and in some ways, how we study and understand schooling has been influenced by our assimilation to a neoliberal society. Neoliberal actors have used market-based principles and private-sector approaches to co-opt regulatory processes inherent in democratic institutions and other public domains such as public schools (Endacott et al., 201; Giroux, 2004). Ball (2003) discusses the notion of performativity and presents three key policy technologies that have been used to realign teaching with the values, culture, and ethics of the private sector. Holloway and Brass (2018) describe Ball's (2003) technologies as:

> [M]arket technologies that promote competition and allow stakeholders to make decisions, management technologies designed to manage behavior by promoting self-discipline and a team spirit thereby encouraging self-sacrifice for the benefit of the organization, and performance technologies, or quality indicators that reorient teacher behavior so they can be 'good teachers.' (p. 363).

In the context of schools, market technologies manifest in ways such as school choice where parents are viewed as stakeholders responsible for making decisions that ultimately impact the entire public school system. Management technologies are exemplified by teachers' evaluation portfolios and team meetings where grade-level teams are required to submit meeting minutes

and account for all time spent throughout their day. Performance technologies may resemble high-stakes tests in which student mastery is indicated by performance on standardized tests as a means of determining the value-added by a specific teacher. Various scholars imply many of these key policy technologies in their work as they describe the ways in which teachers are being reduced to technicians who accept constant surveillance and rely on numerical indicators of learning (Holloway & Brass, 2018, p. 379; Lipman, 2011; Masuda, 2010; Scanlon, 2011; Wills & Sandholtz, 2009).

It is important to note that at a macro-level, neoliberal policy has impacted the degree to which teaching is considered a profession. Lipman (2011) notes that we have witnessed a "shift from teacher professionalism and relatively complex, socially situated notions of learning and teaching to a post welfarist [emphasis] on instrumental efficiency, effectiveness, productivity, and measurable performance" (p. 127). The successful permeation of this "technocratic logic" in school systems has placed external pressure on teachers to accept reforms as they are increasingly positioned as "quasi-professionals who lack a widely-respected set of professional standards" (Endacott et al, 2015, p. 418). In addition to this effect, scholars assert that teachers have lost control of their work (Ingersoll, 2003; Stone-Johnson, 2014) as they are rendered powerless to make autonomous decisions (Buckner, 2002; Kohn, 2002; Masuda, 2010; Webb, 2002), and that as teachers' authority and autonomy is diminished, any movement toward professionalization and supporting teachers as professionals is undermined (Chung & Kim, 2010; Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005; Masuda, 2010; Wills & Sandholtz, 2009). Several scholars even claim that professionalism has come to mean compliance with state mandates on professional standards (Leafgren, 2018; Hextall & Mahony, 2000). Teachers are "told what to teach, how they can improve, and what student performance targets they need to hit, resulting in increased

pressures and in some cases, teacher burnout (Hargreaves, 1994; Masuda, 2010; Santoro, 2018).

Recent changes in education policy, particularly those which increase accountability for teachers,

students, and schools "have undermined teaching as an ethical practice and teachers' agency and

sense of professionalism" (Lipman, 2011, p. 127). Ball (2003) posits that the processes that have

impacted the practical aspects of teachers' work have also altered "what it means to be a teacher"

(p. 217).

Despite the above understandings of how teachers' professionalism is increasingly

diminished due to neoliberal effects, as well as the numerous calls to enhance the

professionalism of teachers, there is little empirical research in the US that examines teachers'

understandings of the concept of professionalism (Bair, 2014; Hargreaves, 2000; Helsby, 1996).

The present study sought to address this empirical gap by constructing knowledge with teachers

of their professionalism.

Professionalism

This section reviews major themes within the abundant body of literature on

professionalism, which served as the overarching concept of this study. Primarily, this review

includes studies published within the last three decades, as neoliberal effects of *ANAR* (1983)

have taken hold of the field of education, and more specifically the work of teachers. I begin by

outlining several themes that emerge in the literature. First, professionalism is a term that we

take for granted in everyday conversations, and disparate conceptualizations of professionalism

can be problematic for teachers' work. Second, professionalism has changed (Anderson & Herr,

2015; Ball, 2003; Evetts, 2011; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Sachs, 2003; Stone-Johnson, 2014),

and it has been devalued through an overt and active agenda focused on accountability and the

standardization of teaching (Endacott et al., 2015; Holloway & Brass, 2018; Ravitch, 2013).

Third, while teachers experience professionalism differently, they experience consistent tensions between their professional values and what is required of them as teachers (Ball, 2003; Day & Smethem, 2009; Masuda, 2010; Stone-Johnson, 2014). Fourth, despite the above challenges to teachers' realization of their professionalism, it remains contested space (Day, 2002; Hilferty, 2008; Johnston, 2015; Sachs, 2003; Smaller, 2015), and therefore, there is potential for teachers to engage and reclaim their professionalism.

Definitions

The various ideas and definitions of terms related to professionalism are each imbued with ideologies both complicating the task of understanding teachers' work, and making it difficult to determine what characteristics indicate a professional (Bair, 2014; Friedson, 1994; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996). Smaller (2015) argues that, for teachers, the concept of "professional" is merely ideological, with "little if any descriptive validity" (p. 136) and that this has been the case since the beginning of state schooling systems over 150 years ago. However, he concurs with various scholars that "the definitions and meanings of the term 'professional' itself have always been contested" (p. 137). Throughout the literature, terms related to professionals and professionalism have been defined in various ways, and scholars have conceptualized professionalism differently in their research.

Taking a philosophical approach, Shulman (1998) considers the idea of a profession to be "a special set of circumstances for deep understanding, complex practice, ethical conduct, and higher-order learning, circumstances that define the complexity of the enterprise and explain the difficulties of prescribing both policies and curriculum in this area" (p. 515). He goes on to posit that professionalism contains both a technical and moral aspect. Brint (1994) similarly describes that "[t]echnically, [professionalism promises] competent performance of skilled work involving

the application of broad and complex knowledge, the acquisition of which required formal study. Morally, it [promises] to be guided by an appreciation of the important social ends it [serves]" (p. 7). Additional attributes put forward by various scholars are discussed in a later part of this section.

Not only are there multiple interpretations of what constitutes a profession, but definitions of the many terms associated within professionalism literature are also varied. Take for example, the term professionalism. According to Ingersoll and Merrill (2011), professionalism "refers to the attitudinal or psychological attributes of those who are considered to be, or aspire to be considered as, professionals" (p. 107) and very similarly, Friedson (1994) defines it as "a state of mind…[something] central to the identity of the professional. Legault (2006) characterizes professionalism as four interlocking traits characterizing professionals' relationships to their clients. The traits are: needs-centered, help-and-trust based, asymmetric, and consensual. This characterization places emphasis on the dependent, and unqualified nature of the client, and the experience of the professional to provide the client with what they need. However, Hargreaves (2000) explains professionalism as "improving the quality and standards of practice" (p. 152) and various others have argued that while professionalism can represent characteristics of individuals within a profession, by definition, it is representative of norms, conduct, and skills accepted by the collective community of practitioners (Bair, 2014; Evans, 2008; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Professionalization, according to Ingersoll and Merrill (2011), refers to the degree to which a type of work exhibits the attributes and characteristics of the professional model presented earlier, but Hargreaves (2000) defines professionalization as "improving status and standing" of a profession. (p. 152). Evans (2008) describes professionality as "an ideologically-,

attitudinally-, intellectually-, and epistemologically-based stance on the part of an individual, in relation to the practice of the profession to which s/he belongs, and which influences her/his professional practice" (p. 28). Bair (2014) clarifies Evans' (2008) conceptualization that professionalism is the plural of professionality, which is an amalgamation of individuals' professionalities.

In spite of the variety of definitions, Sachs (2003) posits that "[t]he idea of professionals and professionalism has such a common currency in everyday language that the explanatory power of these concepts is becoming meaningless" (p. 1). Using window cleaning as an example of common services provided with *professional* care, and used car salesmen advertising a *professional* code of practice, Sachs (2003) questions what use the term "professional" has for teachers, both individually and collectively.

Approaches to Professionalism

The question of whether teaching is a profession is not unrelated to the malleable definition of a profession; based on criteria or definitions being employed, an occupation may be qualified differently along the spectrum of professionalism. In the 1930s, sociologists Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) introduced a traits-based approach to defining professions. Traits-based models simply listed traits that appeared to distinguish professional work from that of other workers.

However, in the 1950s and 60s, structural-functionalism emerged as a competing approach to defining professionalism, critiquing traits-based approaches for their lack of conceptual linking between traits (Maxwell, 2015). Shulman (1998) forwards a series of characteristics that can be used to determine whether a certain type of work or worker should be considered a profession or professional, respectively. The characteristics are:

The obligation of *service* to others, as in a 'calling'; *understanding* of a scholarly or

theoretical kind; a domain of skilled performance or *practice*; the exercise of *judgment*

under conditions of unavoidable uncertainty; the need for *learning from experience* as

theory and practice interact; and a professional *community* to monitor quality and

aggregate knowledge. (p. 516; italics included in original).

Shulman (1998) reinforces the idea that professions are primarily about practice and that

ultimately, claims of knowledge do not get adopted until they stand the test of practice, by

professionals in the field.

Sociologists Ingersoll and Merrill (2011) present what they claim to be an agreed-upon

structural-functionalist professional model. The characteristics of the professional model are as

follows: "rigorous training and licensing requirements, positive working conditions, an active

professional organization or association, substantial workplace authority, relatively high

compensation, and high prestige" (p. 107). Ingersoll and Merrill (2011) admit that these are not

the only characteristics used to determine whether an occupation is a profession, but they claim

them to be the most widely used indicators, particularly related to discussions of teachers and

schools. According to the professional model, teaching can be highly variable depending on the

school context, but overall, it does not fare well in many of the categories, and may continue to

be considered at best, a "semi-profession" (Lortie, 1969, 1975).

From a structural-functionalist approach, Maxwell (2015) uses several criteria for

identifying "teacher as professional" as a metaphor in order to explore what it illuminates and

hides about important features of teachers' work, as "the metaphors we use influence the way we

interpret reality" (p. 94). He finds that:

The model highlights that teachers provide an important public service, that teaching

involves creative knowledge work, and that teachers possess power in the sense that their

decisions can have a significant impact on the lives of the young people they teach, Yet,

as it highlights these dimensions of teaching…it also hides that teaching involves a

continual relationship that has at its centre a young person's personal development, the

multi-faceted accountability relations inherent in teaching, and the public nature of the

teaching's knowledge base. (p. 101).

Historical Overview of Professions

Ample scholarship conceptualizing the ways in which professionalism has changed can

be found throughout the literature (Anderson & Herr, 2015; Ball, 2003; Evetts, 2011; Holloway

& Brass, 2018; Sachs, 2003; Smaller, 2015; Stone-Johnson, 2014), and even a brief review of the

evolution of professions provides valuable insight into why teaching provides a challenge to

specific categorization. Throughout history, few occupations were considered professions; most

were classified as trades or crafts. According to many scholars, traditional professions included

divinity, law, and medicine, although Ingersoll and Merrill (2011) argue for university teaching,

architecture, science, and engineering to be added to the list. Traditional professions were

considered as such because they possessed a body of abstract knowledge that was applied to

cases on an individual basis (Abbot, 1988), autonomy (Scanlon, 2011), and devotion to the

service of others (Abbot, 1988; Bair, 2014; Scanlon, 2011); overall, hallmarks of a profession

have historically been considered to be knowledge, service; and autonomy. Additionally,

requirements of entry into the profession and means of maintaining ethical standards were

determined collectively by members of the profession itself (Bair, 2014; Friedson, 1994; Sockett,

1993; Strike & Ternasky, 1993).

Smaller (2015) puts forth the argument that the concept of professionalism in the United

States has played an ideological role in society, and in large part against classroom teachers'

interests. He describes how in the early and mid-nineteenth century, during an era when the

nation's capitalist economy was expanding, the government encouraged the formation of

occupational groups both in and beyond education. The charge of these new professional

workers was two-fold: to socialize working class populations, and to serve as an example of

possible class mobility (Smaller, 2015). Because they played an important role in class and state

relations, teachers were allowed access, at least in the ideological sense, to the category of

professional (Smaller, 2015). However, they were, and continuously have been, deterred from

forming unions, or other organizing bodies on the basis that they occupied an important position

in the social structure and were to serve as models of the "proper subject" (Smaller, 1993). So, as

Smaller (2015) explains:

> [T]he ideology of professionalism continued…throughout the history of the state
>
> schooling systems. It suggested, first that teachers should aspire to become role models,
>
> and "professionally distanced" in their communities and, second, their task in the
>
> classroom, above all, was to induce internalisation of "proper" values and behaviour
>
> among their students. (p. 144).

Individuals such as anthropologist Margaret Mead, responded by proposing that teachers had a

responsibility to teach their pupils to ignore traditional impulses and act as necessary to achieve

their goals prompting policy-makers to increase their defining and promotion of "state-

envisioned forms of 'professionalism'" (Smaller, 2015, p. 145). This trend has continued, and

nationally, as described in the previous section, the profession of teaching has remained the focus

of policy initiatives for the past several decades (Chung & Kim, 2010). This has led some

scholars to explore the emergence of two seemingly contradictory trends within teacher

professionalism literature: on one hand, there appears to be a call for increased professional standards and a push towards greater professionalism, and on the other hand, movement towards an increase in the standardization of teaching and antipathy to teachers' professionalization (Bair, 2014; Hargreaves, 2000). However, rather than contradicting each other, my interpretation is that extant literature moving toward a *certain kind of* professionalism actually runs parallel to literature on the standardization of teachers' work and professionalism. This review of the literature will work to make clear what this certain kind of professionalism is.

Hargreaves' Four Ages of Professionalism

Hargreaves (2000) theorizes the development of teacher professionalism as passing through four phases throughout history and argues that current societal perceptions of teacher professionalism and professionalization are a product of these ages. He refers to the ages as: the pre-professional age, the age of the autonomous professional, the age of the collegial professional, and the fourth age/post-professional/postmodern, and describes how each has witnessed a change in the nature of teachers' professionalism, as well as changes in their professional learning. Hargreaves describes the pre-professional age as a time when "teaching was seen as managerially demanding but technically simple, its principles and parameters were treated as unquestioned commonsense, one learned to be a teacher through practical apprenticeship, and one improved as a teacher by individual trial-and-error" (p. 156). Drawing from the pre-professional age are assumptions of teaching such as: teachers are enthusiastic they know how to get their content across to students, they can keep order in the classroom, and learn to teach by watching others do it. In summary, teaching is a simple task.

Beginning in the 1960s, we entered the age of the autonomous professional which is marked by the beginning of pre-service education in the university setting and teachers being

granted pedagogical autonomy in their classrooms. This autonomy, however, fostered a sense of individualism whereby teachers interacted very little, including teaching in isolation. The age of the autonomous professional insulated teachers from everyone outside of their classroom, which we still see manifesting as a disconnect between teachers' work and the larger community.

In the mid to late 1980s, or the age of the collegial professional, teaching was becoming increasingly demanding as schooling contexts became more complex and administrative mandates were more frequently imposed. Teachers began turning to their colleagues "for professional learning, for a sense of direction, and a sense of support" (p. 162). This age was also when the wave of educational reform was building and collaboration helped teachers develop responses to suddenly intensified demands on their work. It is during this age that the distinction between new professionalism- collegial and collective, versus old professionalism- autonomous and individual, was made. Nationally, we are still dwelling in this age, with a solid foot in the door of the fourth age of the post-professional.

This post-professional, or as it is sometimes referred to as the postmodern, scenario is marked by a set of assaults on the professionalism of teaching driven by neoliberal efforts and market-based principles that in effect are returning teaching to a deprofessionalized state. Hargreaves (2000) states that one effect of the post-professional age that is important to consider in this study is that "teachers and principals are now having to turn outwards toward wider publics as they plan, prepare and defend what they teach" (p. 172). He goes on to suggest that there is increasing need for efforts to strengthen interactive relationships between professionals within schools and individuals outside of them. This is an extremely important point to consider in this study, namely that at this point in time there is a need to turn outward toward public spaces to strengthen relationships and defend professionalism.

Empirical Work on Professionalism

As mentioned in an earlier section, little empirical work exists exploring teachers'

understandings of professionalism. One study related to teachers' constructions of their

professionalism was conducted by Helsby (1996), over 20 years ago, in which he engaged with

teachers in England to construct their understanding of what it means to be a professional. Using

individual interviews, he found that the 15 teachers responded in one of two ways. First, teachers

spoke of *being professional*, which had to do with the traits of a profession, maintaining a

professional demeanor, and compliance with curricula and standards. In most cases, teachers felt

that they "regarded themselves as professionals, although this could generally be interpreted in

terms of conviction that professional standards of behaviour were being maintained rather than

as a reflection of their perceived status in society" (p. 322). Second, teachers spoke of *behaving*

professionally, which was interpreted as doing all that you can to meet the needs of your

students, building relationships with colleagues, and possessing the pedagogical skills to respond

to multiple demands in complex contexts. The main challenge Helsby (1996) confronted in this

study is one main challenge of studying teacher professionalism still today, namely "the

problematic and contested nature of concepts such as 'professional'" (p. 320). Helsby's (1996)

study does little in the way of supporting this study's methodology as major methodological

components are missing in the article, including the sampling technique and participants

themselves, interview questions, and findings and themes that emerged from the interviews are

vague at best. This study, however, used the two categories of findings, *being* a professional, and

behaving professionally, to inform the initial discussions and interview protocols.

Bair (2014) conducted an exploratory, cross-professional case-study to examine the

difference in conceptualizations of professionalism between faculty and students in a school of

education and faculty and students in a school of social work. The study involved conducting 16

semi-structured interviews, collecting open-ended survey responses from 66 elementary

education students, 69 secondary education students, and 43 social work students, and analyzing

a variety of documents related to professionalism. Two major themes emerged from the research:

individualistic professionalism and collective professionalism. School of education faculty and

students expressed individualistic and restricted views of professionalism, meaning they lacked a

common frame of reference and described professionalism mostly in terms of classroom

procedures. One of the major points that Bair (2014) acknowledges in her discussion is how:

> Given the daily attacks on public education, it is clear that professionalism needs to be
>
> taken beyond the private world of the classroom into the public sphere…We need to
>
> prepare teachers who have an understanding of the larger context of education and can
>
> take responsibility, not only for the students in their classrooms, but for the future of the
>
> profession itself. (p. 51).

This study was informed by both Bair's (2014) thematic findings and her call for the importance

of making professionalism part of the public discourse.

Within the field, there is an absence of empirical research on professionalism, and of the

work that has been done, little research examines teachers' agency within their experiences of

professionalism. Given that professionalism has been, and continues to be, a contested area of

educational research, and provided the current neoliberal education landscape, it is important to

consider teachers' roles in shaping their professionalism. I suggest this begins with

understanding how teachers understand their professionalism.

Agency Theory

There has been a recent resurgence in the work being done with agency as it pertains to

education. In some parts of the world, mostly the United Kingdom (UK) and other parts of Europe, it is because teachers are increasingly regarded as occupying a crucial position in educational improvements and reform (Fu & Clarke, 2017; Parker, 2014; Phyälto, Pietarinen, & Soini, 2012; Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015; Robinson, 2012). However, despite increased attention to agency as a concept, Priestley et al. (2015) remind us that "agency remains an inexact and poorly conceptualised construct in much of the literature, where it is often not clear" as to what the term is referring" (p. 2).

Research on the role that agency plays in the adoption, adaptation, or resistance to reforms is quickly beginning to dominate the literature (Fu & Clarke, 2017; Phyältö et al., 2012; Priestley et al., 2015; Robinson, 2012). Unfortunately, agency is rarely researched for the sole purpose of understanding teachers' experiences of agency development. Robinson (2012) provides a brief explanation for why agency is such a complex idea to isolate, stating that "[t]he dynamic interplay between the temporal and the spatial makes mapping agency and defining a theory of agency problematic" (p. 233). Although contextual factors render theorizing agency difficult, this study sought to perhaps sift through its various interpretations within the literature and then use a single approach to explore teachers' experiences.

Various Theorizations of Agency

The literature on agency has been theorized using several approaches to contextualize it within specific research paradigms. In this section, I review the treatment, and exploration, of agency from psychological, sociological, critical, historical, and post-structural traditions.

Spending much of his academic career theorizing human agency through a psychological lens, Albert Bandura advanced several iterations of agency definition. In his most recent theorizing, Bandura (2006) describes human agency as "the evolutionary emergence of advanced

symbolising capacity [which enables] humans to transcend the dictates of their immediate environment and…shape their life circumstances and the courses their lives take" (Fu & Clarke, 2017, p. 585). Earlier psychological work (Bandura, 2001; Scardamalia, 2002; Martin, 2004) referred to agency as "one's capability and motivation to make choices and the intentional action taken as a result of these choices in a way that makes a difference in one's life and community" (Phyältö et al., 2014, p. 306). Human agency, according to the psychological approach forefronts individual capacity, with social influences acting upon the individual. Examples of empirical work exploring agency from this approach may resemble studies of mindfulness and self-reflection (Christou & Bullock, 2014; Mooney, 2014), encouraging teachers to take control of their work through activities designed to increase engagement with their work-life balance. Missing from the psychological interpretation of agency, for the purposes of this study, is the acknowledgment of any role that interactions with other individuals play and the potential for collective agency.

Ahearn (2001) defines agency as "the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act" (p. 112), which neatly summarizes the view of agency from a sociological perspective. There are two central tenets of agency in sociology- capability, or the possibility of acting otherwise, and knowledgeability, which is what individuals know about their society and their actions within it (Fu & Clarke, 2017). In both cases, emphasis is placed on the individual which remains true to Giddens' (1984) original conception of agency in which "an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently. Whatever happened would not have happened if that individual had not intervened" (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökka, & Paloniemi, 2013, p. 49). Biesta and Tedder (2007) conceptualize agency as a person's "ability, competence, and power to critically shape their

responses to problematic situations" (p. 11) through what they call an ecological approach.

Biesta and Tedder (2007) explain how:

> [T]his concept of agency highlights that actors always act by means of their environment
>
> rather than simply in their environment [and] the achievement of agency will always
>
> result from the interplay of individual efforts, available resources and contextual and
>
> structural factors as they come together in particular, and in a sense always unique
>
> situations. (p. 137).

Further, Biesta et al. (2015) explored the idea of ecological conditions and circumstances

impacting agency, and since then, various scholars have embraced it in their research (Bergh &

Wahlstrom, 2018; Fu & Clarke, 2017; Pantić, 2017; Hokkä, Eteläpelto, & Rasku-Puttonen, 2012;

Pillay, 2017). The authors summarize agency as "not something that people can have; it is

something that people do" (Biesta et al., 2015, p. 626) or, more precisely, something they

achieve[5].

Biesta and colleagues (2015) draw from Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) work, and

specifically their framework called the 'chordal triad of agency,' which views a person's agency

as impacted by their past experiences, projections toward their future, and interactions with the

present. These dimensions are called the iterational, projective, and the practical-evaluative,

respectively. Emirbayer and Mische (1998), are clear that in any concrete situation, all three

dimensions are present, but do not necessarily play equal roles (Biesta et al., 2015) and according

to Biesta and Tedder (2007), individuals may enact more or less agency at different times.

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[5] I diverge with Biesta et al. on the notion that an individual can achieve agency, as it seems to
counter the idea that agency is responsive to an environment. If someone achieves agency, it
follows that they can activate it at any time, whereas an ecological understanding of agency
would suggest that individuals are constantly enacting different degrees of agency at any time
and in any place.

Differently, but still within the sociological approach, Pillay (2017) describes Archer's (2000) understanding of how an individual's enactment of agency is dependent upon "experiences, events, and contexts in which people find themselves. The capacity and potential for agency emerges and changes as people interact with different environments as they encounter experiences, and as their material and social worlds change" (p. 2). Missing from Archer's (2000) explanation is the necessary future projections which is compelling about Biesta et al.'s (2015) work.

From a critical perspective, agency enactment is primarily focused on empowerment, emancipation, equity, social justice, or other issues in that vein. In the field of education, this approach highlights a teacher's responsibility to act as an agent of change in order to address inequities and social injustices in educational contexts (Fu & Clarke, 2017). Giroux (2001) emphasizes the importance of agency to overcome imposing and oppressive structures of power and dominant ideologies, agreeing with various scholars (Bandura, 2006; Giddens, 1984) that agency encompasses the recognition of alternative possibilities and that capacity is impacted by social contexts (Fu & Clarke, 2017).

Research on historical agency focuses on the importance of historical consciousness (Seixas, 2004, 2012). From this perspective, history "shapes present intention and actions through unconscious legacies such as traditions, habits, and rules, and historical consciousness, which through analysis of the past and how it shapes the present, opens the possibility of historical agency in respect to the future" (Fu & Clarke, 2017, p. 587). Historical, psychological, sociological, and critical approaches all share understandings of how agency and structure interact. More specifically, each tradition views agency as informed by historical, or past, structures. The historical tradition acknowledges the importance of time and the collective

dimensions with regards to understanding agency but fails to address how present interactions with others impact an individual's agency.

Poststructuralist theory attempts to challenge assumptions of who can exert agency, and focuses specifically on disrupting notions of agency that exclude marginalized communities. Davies (2000) argues that agency:

> [I]s never free from discursive constitution of self, but the capacity to recognize that constitution and to resist, subvert, and change the discourses themselves...It is the freedom to recognize multiple readings such that no discursive practice, or positioning within it by powerful others, can capture and control one's identity. And agency is never autonomy in the sense of being an individual standing outside social structure and process. (p. 67).

This perspective is increasingly important in today's educational settings where families and students in certain communities are viewed as lacking agency.

Professional Agency

Professional agency has become the focus of recent international research, particularly in the fields of teaching and teacher education (Billett, 2014; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Lasky, 2005; Priestley, Edwards, & Priestley, 2012; Vähäsantanen, 2015). According to Vähäsantanen (2015) and others, defined simply, "professional agency refers to the notion that professionals such as teachers have the power to act, to affect matters, to make decisions and choices, and take stances in relation to their work and professional identities" (p. 1) (Lasky, 2005; Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011). Phyältö et al. (2014), take a broader approach, considering professional agency to be "[t]eachers' self-efficacy, motivation, and participatory skills that are constructed and manifested in the everyday interactions of schools" (p. 100). The authors go on to describe

teachers' professional agency as a relational phenomenon dependent upon interactions between various individuals at the school level. However, Phyältö et al. (2014) do not acknowledge the role prior, personal or professional, experiences and other variables, such as temporality or environment, play in teachers' enactment of their professional agency, maintaining the view that agency is an individualized capacity. Hökkä et al. (2012) offer a different view, considering teachers' identities as central, defining professional agency as teachers' "capacity to negotiate and renegotiate professional identities within their local work practices" (p. 86). Robinson (2012) presents the most expansive understanding of professional agency, defining it as "the extent to which control is achieved by a group of teachers…reliant upon the dialogical relationship between external constraints and structures, and the political and economic environment, in balance with the individual and collective life experiences of the group" (p. 234). As was described earlier, this ecological understanding is now central to various scholars' approaches to exploring agency (Bergh & Wahlstrom, 2018; Fu & Clarke, 2017; Pantić, 2017; Hökkä et al., 2012; Pillay, 2017).

Teacher Agency

Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015) remind us that "the concept of teacher agency itself is not unproblematic" (p. 2). Within the literature, teacher agency both diverges and draws from literature on professional agency (Fu & Clarke, 2017; Pantić, 2017). Quinn and Carl (2015) use both terms- teacher and professional- in their definition of teacher professional agency to refer to "the ability of teachers to control their work within structural constraints" (p. 745). They are clearly borrowing from Sewell's (1992) original and Hilferty's (2008) later modified definition of teacher professional agency, or "the power of teachers to actively and purposefully direct their own working lives within structurally determined limits (p. 167). Pantić's (2017)

study of teacher agency for social justice in a school in Scotland, considers teachers' agency to be impacted by their sense of purpose, competence, scope of autonomy, and reflexivity as necessary factors. Teacher agency, therefore, "involves a commitment to pursue a sense of, at least partly self-determined purposes informed by the underlying beliefs about their professional roles" (Pantić, 2017, p. 220). Even when scholars use the term teacher agency, their definitions are blurred with other terms' definitions (Bergh & Wahlstrom, 2018).

Enacted Professionalism

Hilferty (2008) coined the term enacted professionalism during a time in Australia when education was becoming increasingly technocratic and when teachers were being excluded from educational decision-making. The author refers to enacted professionalism as "an active process of social engagement through which teachers shape their own worklives" (p. 164). This concept is grounded in work by Foucault (1994) that sees power as an ever-present feature of human interaction. Along these lines, Sachs' (2003) work calls for teachers to reinvent themselves as activist professionals, an idea that is in line with Hilferty's (2008) work.

Approaches to Understanding Agency

As demonstrated, the definitions of agency are both numerous and nuanced, depending on the approach being used, and therefore, scholars' interpretations of agency overlap and compete in the literature. The agency-structure debate dominates the existing research on agency. On one hand, agency can be thought of in terms of a capacity- something that people either have and enact individually or collectively, or that they never realize or enact. On the other hand, agency can be thought of as multi-dimensional and informed by a variety of structural factors, both contextual and personal, as well as temporal and spatial. I take issue with this conceptualization of agency as an always/never binary. In my experience as a teacher, there were

times when I felt more confident in enacting my agency and times when I felt completely unable to find my voice. The ideas that Biesta et al. (2015) forward as the enactment of agency depending on multiple factors resonates more with my experiences. Parker (2014) provides a spectrum of agency, which could also be described as an extension of the structure-agency concept, to help us understand the various approaches to agency within the literature. Archer's (2000) identification of three positions of agency is used in this approach and most literature on this topic can be categorized under one of these three positions.

On one end of the spectrum is an *internal* approach, where agency is viewed as an individual capacity unaffected by potential structural constraints, and one that is supported by several studies (Bandura, 2006; Clarke and Erickson, 20004; Christou & Bullock, 2014; Eteläpelto et al., 2013). Bandura (2006) suggests that metacognition is central to human agency, and utilizing exercises where teachers engage in internal processes of self-reflection and mindfulness, is grounded in an internal approach. Christou and Bullock's (2014) research, focusing on philosophical mindedness as a means of supporting teachers as agents of change, would be another example of work from an internal approach.

At the other end of the spectrum is the *determinism* approach which replaces agency with structure (Priestley et al., 2012) meaning we are bound by structural and historical conditions of our institutions with little room for agency enactment. Surprisingly, I could not find any examples of this approach in the agency literature, even as it pertains to technocratic educational reforms. This may suggest that teachers, to some extent, maintain a small degree of agency in their work, but it may also indicate that in contexts where teachers are intentionally and completely deterred from enacting agency, research is less desirable or fruitful.

In the middle of these two positions is the *centrist* approach where both individual

capacity and structural and contextual factors act as variables in the enactment of agency. This centrist position is aligned with Biesta and Tedder's (2007) ecological understanding of agency as a phenomenon impacted by both temporal and relational variables. Similar understandings can be found in the literature as well. For example, Archer (2000) posits that in order to enact agency, individuals must have the power to not only reflect on their contexts, but also to envision alternatives to realizing various alternatives. Additionally, Schön's (1984) concept of reflective transformation, whereby teachers look inward and think backward as a means of planning to move forward, acknowledges the role that structures play, while also allowing for engagement with potential futures.

Teachers' Perceptions of Agency

In addition to exploring the question of whether an individual possesses agency or if it is something constructed through various temporalities and realities, another issue explored in the literature is whether, and how, teachers perceive their agency. Existing literature indicates that in the context of educational reform, teachers experience different degrees of agency depending on the level of implementation (Phyältö et al., 2012; Vähäsantanen, 2015). For example, Vähäsantanen (2015) conducted a meta-study investigating Finnish vocational teachers' professional agency within the context of educational change, expanding upon earlier work by Phyältö et al. (2012) who first explored this concept in Finland. He found that at the community and organizational levels, teachers experienced a lack of direct influence on the contents and conditions of their work. More concretely, "in the context of transforming education, teachers often perceive themselves as passive objects whose actions are mainly regulated by external bodies, rather than as active subjects whose opinions and ideas do matter" (Vähäsantanen, 2014, p. 5), confirming earlier work by scholars (Lasky, 2005; Phyältö et al., 2012; van Veen &

Sleegers, 2009). Vähäsantanen (2015) also found that at the individual level, vocational teachers did seem to have a strong sense of agency in their work, which appeared in the form of teachers having opportunities to make pedagogical decisions. In order to explore teachers' sense of agency, this study utilized a theory grounded in participating in their work and situations outside of their work.

Participatory Democratic Theory

Višnovsky and Zolcer (2016) describe "Deweyan democracy [as] participatory through and through" (p. 67) and go on to describe the core of participatory democracy as "the idea of a communitarian educational institution in which all participate as equal and free agents in order to share their experiences and competences with the aim of mutual growth" (p. 71). John Dewey is known for forwarding the worthy goal of democracy (Rogers, 2012), and in *The Public and Its Problems* (1927/2012) makes the case for an ongoing effort to incorporate robust civic discourse as a means of revitalizing the existing democratic system of government. Dewey (1927/2012) also suggests the important role of ongoing deliberation in efforts to unify.

Participatory democratic theory is a distinct theory of democracy that "envisions the maximum participation of citizens in their self-governance, especially in sectors of society beyond those that are traditionally understood to be political (for example, the household and workplace)" (Hilmer, 2010, p. 43). Influenced by Dewey, C. Wright Mills, and Paul Goodman, participatory democratic theory originated with Arnold S. Kaufman's (1960) vague call for a "participatory politics," and was later articulated more clearly by members of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) during their convention in Port Huron, Michigan in 1964. Participatory democratic theory experienced its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s, but by 1990, had

fallen out of use by most American political scientists, and replaced by deliberative democracy (Hilmer, 2010). Pateman (1970) is credited with the most comprehensive description of participatory democratic theory which concludes that active civic participation can enable feelings of political efficacy in the populous. Pateman (1970) argued that "the notion of a participatory society requires that the scope of the term 'political' should be/must be extended to cover spheres outside the national government" (p. 106).

Pateman (2012) outlines several elements that she considers most important to participatory democratic theory. First, "individuals learn to participate by participating…thus, individuals need to interact within democratic authority structures that make participation possible" (p. 10). Second, participatory democratic theory is about changes that will make it possible for citizens to participate in democracy in every aspect of their lives. Third, we must work towards creating a truly democratic society. And fourth, change must take place at the structural level, meaning we must reform our social structures to accommodate democratic practices.

While empirical research using participatory democracy is common and plentiful in the field of political science (Botwinick, 2010; Boyte, 2014; 2015; Fung, 2004; Mutz, 2008), recent articles seemingly center around a single location- Porto Alegre, Brazil, where scholars claims that participatory democracy is the way of life (Baiocchi, 2011; Fung, 2011; Pateman, 2012). Bartch (2016) claims that after the 1960s and 1970s, democratic empirical theory "seemed to run out of energy" (p. 220). In the field of education, literature on participatory democratic theory is seemingly limited to empirical work with civics education, service learning (Heldman, 2011), or in higher education settings (Bartch, 2016; Levine, 2007; Nudelman & Hecker, 2008) and

generally explores the extent to which participants embrace participatory democratic norms. Recently, research around participatory democratic theory has been focused on arguing for its salience as a way to understand and revitalize democracy in the United States today.

An exemplar is an educational project conducted by Dennis (2015) in which he uses a participatory democracy framework to examine digitally mediated communications, exploring how citizens support or oppose policy, but discusses more generally how important it is for teachers, particularly, to participate on issues of policy and to publicize their professional knowledge and share practical and pedagogical concerns. Dennis' (2015) study additionally exemplifies the usefulness of agency theory in studies related to teachers' work as his work fails to acknowledge the idea that teachers may lack a sense of agency, leading them to feel excluded from participating in democratic discourse in the first place.

While I have suggested that little empirical evidence of scholarship using participatory democratic theory can be found in educational research, this is not necessarily problematic for the purposes of this study, and for the role that participatory democratic theory plays in my conceptual framework. While it would be helpful to understand the nuanced ways in which participatory democratic theory has been, and is currently being, used in research related to my work, several conceptual and theoretical articles exist that employ participatory democracy in their frameworks (Bartch, 2016; Sharoni, 2012), and have informed this study. Bartch (2016) for example, reminds us that "the study of democratic theory does not have to be confined to the realm of democratic theory…research should be opened up to the literature from a variety of fields including education" (p. 219). The author specifically calls for other empirically grounded theory to be studied through case studies, educational practices, or other phenomena "embracing

the spirit of participatory democracy" (p. 216). To that end, this study considers participatory democratic theory and its usefulness as a framework for exploring teachers experiences with professionalism and how they construct knowledge within a participatory democratic space.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of the extant literature on professionalism, agency theory, and participatory democratic theory. This study examines concepts of teacher agency and professionalism, given the ideal of democracy and the reality of neoliberalism. It aims to fill several scholarly gaps in extant literature related to teachers' work and their experiences with democratic participation related to their profession. Currently, the concepts of teacher agency and professionalism are not well-defined or agreed upon, and while the quality of our nation's education system depends on the capacity of teachers to have professional input into their work, very few studies explore teachers' experiences in spaces where they are asked for such input. Adding to the difficulty of understanding professionalism and agency is an absence of inquiry dedicated to constructing knowledge with teachers' perspectives at its core. There appears to be a disconnect between scholarly acknowledgement that teachers are largely excluded from decision-making processes within their profession, and the way in which teachers are also often left out of knowledge construction within research studies. This study operates under the assumption that our comprehension of how teachers understand and experience professionalism is incomplete. Finally, while existing literature shows the ways that neoliberalism is encroaching upon, and increasingly constraining teachers' work, very little research exists that considers the potential for teachers to reclaim their professionalism using democratic principles and practices.

An interesting trend spanning each of the three bodies of research is that not much

empirical research exists (Stemhagen, 2011). Much of the existing literature sought to explore

definitions from various traditions and paradigms. Another similarity between professionalism

literature and literature on agency and agency theory is that a remarkable number of definitions

and conceptualizations of the terms exist. I believe that incongruent understandings and

frameworks of professionalism and agency found within research, and as a result, teachers'

practice, continue to preclude teachers' realization of either. With competing terms and

inconsistent understandings of how to encourage teachers' agency development and enactment,

policymakers, school leaders, and teacher educators are ill-equipped to serve in supportive ways.

I also suggest that the pervasiveness of research on agency in the context of reform signals a

problematic view of teachers within the current educational landscape for many reasons. First,

many prominent educational reforms are inherently anti-teacher agency, as they often prioritize

the expertise of policy-makers, and in many cases, non-teachers, over that of teachers. Second,

the increasingly prevalent trend of research on agency within the reform context positions

teachers as recipients of, and respondents to, educational decisions rather than participants in

conversations and discourses impacting their professional work. Through constructing

knowledge with teachers of their professionalism, this work seeks to also construct knowledge of

professionalism and agency, and to do so within the public setting of a democratic space, as

called for in the research on participatory democratic theory.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter I present in detail the qualitative research design that I developed to answer the present study's research questions. To begin, I discuss my stance as a researcher as it informed many of the paradigmatic and methodological decisions I made regarding this study. Next, I explain how the present study fits within a constructivist paradigm, discuss the study's context, and provide an overview of the research design. Following that, I discuss the various phases of the study, including recruitment, data sources, and data analysis. To conclude, I review methods that I used to ensure qualitative rigor, trustworthiness, and credibility of my findings.

Positionality

In my discussion of goals at the end of Chapter 1, I shared how this topic of research and, subsequently, the present study, was extremely personal to me. Not only was I interested in providing teachers with an opportunity to participate in knowledge construction regarding their professionalism, but I was also interested in understanding how teachers' professional identities and understandings of professionalism are impacted by their participation in democratic spaces[6] as a means of potentially expanding future opportunities for them to enact their agency. These motivations were largely based in personal experiences I had as a public-school teacher and activist, and as the present study's primary data collection instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rodwell, 1998), I recognized while my personal subjectivities had the potential to serve as valuable tools throughout this process (Finlay, 2002), they also had the potential to impact the data and interpretations drawn from it (Finlay, 2002). Therefore, in this

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[6] Specifically for this study, the Mayoral Teacher Advisory Council (MTAC)

section I assess, through a process of reflexivity, my researcher subjectivities that I believe were important to consider in light of this study.

First, I am the product of public schools. My dad was in the Air Force, so my family (Dad, Mom, sister, brother, and I) moved around the country and I attended multiple public schools as a child. My mom was extremely invested in our education. She was at our schools all the time, speaking with our teachers and the principal if she had any concerns about our academics. Somehow, she was able to exercise a great deal of influence over who we had as teachers, and we even moved to a different school district over whether we would attend 5th grade in elementary school or middle school. I share this because it was clear to me from a very young age that education was important, and my mom may as well have been a teacher by the way she convinced me of that. However, my family lineage does not trace back to generations of educators. My sister, one cousin, Joseph, and I are the only teachers in our family and conversations about what we do and the state of education are rare at family gatherings. If the topic of conversation does shift to teaching, rarely does it move beyond perceptions of teachers' work and the students we teach; all three of us work in urban school districts and our family has very general opinions about our working conditions and our students' circumstances. So, my conversations about teaching and education have generally been limited to my colleagues and peers, and other people who have experience with teaching. When I was in the classroom, I relied on my colleagues for their support and for their perspectives and interpretations of experiences. I quickly realized the importance of conversations amongst teachers, not only for the sense of community they foster, but also for the meaning making that takes place in those discussions.

Second, I was a public-school teacher for a decade in Richmond Public Schools (RPS). I

taught 4th Grade for four years, Kindergarten for one year, and served as a Reading Specialist for five years. I taught in two schools and in both settings, teachers were extremely close and family-like due to less-than-supportive school administrations. My colleagues and I regularly spent time together outside of school, and talked over the phone on weekends. We attended each other's weddings and baby showers, and felt a sense of loss each time a colleague left teaching. We are still in touch with each other, though many of us have left the classroom and RPS. During my time in the classroom, I became frustrated by the way I felt my work changing. I began speaking up at school board meetings and organizing teachers to speak as well. However, when it came time to attend meetings and advocate, my colleagues didn't show up, explaining in the days that followed that they didn't feel like their voices mattered or that they had any power to make a difference. After two years of being the lone teacher speaking up at meetings, after situations where district-level administrators visited my room in attempts to urge me to just email my concerns rather than speak out, and after being bullied by my school administrators for their perceptions of my advocacy, I left teaching.

I entered a PhD program and began to consider education using a framework and lenses that I had not possessed as a teacher. I was able to view teacher professionalism as a nuanced concept, certainly including classroom professionalism, but also including professional activities that extend beyond the classroom. I became involved with various advocacy groups such as Richmond Teachers for Social Justice (RTSJ), Support Our Schools (SOS), and People Organizing with Educators in Richmond (POWER), that worked to not only inform the community about educational issues, but also to stand up to measures and initiatives we viewed as damaging to the democratic-governance of public education. As someone who was becoming a recognized public education advocate, I stepped into my leadership and was offered

opportunities to be a part of the conversations taking place in closed circles, and behind closed doors, about education. I was being included as a voice for teachers, but I wasn't technically a teacher. My concerns about the lack of teacher presence in those conversations were only strengthened by teachers frustrated about why they weren't invited to the conversations, and some teachers suspicious about my intentions. This was an unsettling position to occupy. I had to wrestle with this tension between advocating on behalf of teachers and not wanting to be perceived as speaking for them. It was an entirely different challenge than not having a seat at the table at all.

So, after leaving the classroom, I served on committees, spoke at press conferences, served as a panelist and guest speaker at multiple forums, and worked closely with school board members and Richmond's mayor on educational initiatives, as a representative of the teaching profession. These experiences shaped my identity as a teacher; while I once felt uncomfortable speaking truth to power, I came to feel a sense of responsibility for advocating and speaking my truth. These experiences also informed my understanding and perspective of working with elected officials and individuals occupying powerful positions. In the beginning of my work as an advocate, I felt important when elected officials would call me for my individual opinions, and would never miss an opportunity to take their calls attend meetings with them. Over time and after multiple experiences when responsiveness was not reciprocated, I began to view power in a different way. I received training, and continued to grow, as a community organizer and learned to consider the power in numbers of people versus individual power, as well as to view the actions of those in power as generally strategic, rather than acts of kindness. My understanding of how power operates has increased, as has my ability to respond to situations where power imbalances are great. Overall, my ability to navigate spaces where power is a factor

is greatly increased due to these experiences over the past couple years.

That being said, one of the most complicated aspects of my researcher stance, as it related to this present study, was the position I occupied with the MTAC. Prior to, and during this study, I facilitated communications between the MTAC and the mayor's office, and also organized the bi-monthly meetings. In many ways, I served as a liaison between the mayor's office and the MTAC to realize its original purpose of advising the mayor, and also worked to ensure that the MTAC received the level of respect it deserved, amidst other priorities.

My identity as a teacher, scholar, advocate, and organizer offered certain opportunities for this research (Sherif, 2001). I was able to recognize that some decisions made about education were deeply political and strategic rather than serving the best interests of teachers, students, and communities. I had experience working with individuals in power and felt comfortable navigating spaces and situations that we occupied together with caution and scrutiny versus when I first began this work and could be easily convinced, or charmed, by elected officials due to my naïve optimism. I worked closely with teachers, and was able to maintain a perspective grounded in teachers' daily classroom experiences. I had also built relationships with individuals who had power to make decisions related to education and thus, I had a solid understanding of many of the contextual factors that I needed to consider while collecting and analyzing data for this study. I also recognized the value of conversations with teachers about their profession and, therefore, was well-equipped to recognize themes in conversations even when teachers themselves did not identify them as such. As Lincoln and Guba (2013) argue, "[shared] constructions require shared experiences, and shared experiences require shared constructions; efforts at common sense-making require some base of prior experience/construction commonality" (p. 53). This suggests that my experiences as a teacher

were both necessary and beneficial to constructing knowledge with MTAC teachers.

On the other hand, my experiences informing my position as researcher also presented challenges for establishing the credibility of this study's findings. Central to my research was the question of how teachers understand their professionalism, which as a review of the literature suggests is contested space (Day, 2002; Hilferty, 2008; Johnston, 2015; Sachs, 2003; Smaller, 2015). As a scholar, I had a somewhat different lens through which to view issues in public education, as well as fairly established assumptions of what teachers' professionalism should look like to forward public education discourse. My lens and assumptions often differed from teachers', and at certain points, conflicted with their exact experiences and how they interpreted them. In order to respond to these challenges to the credibility of this study, I was intentional about several methodological and design choices.

First, I attempted to bound my subjectivity through the use of reflexive journaling and memoing (Rodwell, 1998), which will be discussed in a later section. Additionally, because I engaged with teachers throughout the study, over the course of six months, there were multiple opportunities to confirm that our interpretations aligned. This study was also conducted in the spirit of Research as Praxis (RAP), which is both a paradigm and a vehicle for addressing the lack of democratic approaches to seeking knowledge and understanding in educational research (Torres & Reyes, 2011). Aligned with agency theory and participatory democracy, concepts central to the present study, RAP is "grounded on radical participatory democracy, which implies…the human subjects move from being passive participants as merely providers of information or performing according to a protocol given to them, to become co-researchers and decision-makers" (Torres & Reyes, 2011). Rather than teachers participating in a passive way, the present study positioned them as vital to the construction of knowledge about their

professionalism. Additionally, praxis emphasizes the transformative possibilities of research that includes a process of theorizing, reflecting, and acting (Lincoln, 1997). This project's ongoing and overlapping process was dialogic, and meaning was constructed through conversation among participants. Rodwell (1998) provides further insight into how "interpretations are negotiated because participants are involved in the research process as more than just data provision. They participate in data interpretation as well as theory building. There is reciprocity among all for construction and validation of knowledge" (p. 80). A dialogic approach to research aligned with this study's epistemological underpinnings, particularly the notion that knowledge is socially constructed and negotiated. Having said all that, there were moments when writing the case report and discussion sections that I allowed my subjectivities to respond to teachers' comments, or events that came out in interviews because of my closeness to them. As a researcher, I made decisions about when to completely bound my subjectivities, and when to let them free.

Study Design and Paradigm Choice

Before discussing the specific methodological logistics and rationale that informed this study, I provide the overarching structure[7] of the research design as it related to the research questions. The first research question (RQ1) guiding this study was:

RQ1: How do teachers participating in a democratic space make sense of their professionalism?

The second research question was based on my interest in exploring teachers' agency development and enactment within an increasingly neoliberal educational context:

RQ2: How does participation in a democratic space impact teachers' sense of, and ability to enact, agency?

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[7] An in-depth explanation of the research design occurs in a later section in Chapter 3.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the overarching design of this study. The figure shows phase one, or the Entry Condition, in the largest outside box. This condition of the study remained in place throughout the inquiry as foundational to a constructivist project (Rodwell, 1998). Phases two, three, and four, were situated within the entry condition and represented the inquiry process, including data collection and data analysis, that informed the construction of knowledge. The bi-directional arrows between the phases indicate that not only was each phase informed by knowledge constructed in the previous phase(s), but emerging knowledge required the researcher and participating teachers to both consider and reconstruct knowledge based on new information and experiences. Phase four culminated with the inquiry product, or case report.

Qualitative Research Design

This qualitative study was divided into four phases, and although they are described in succession below, the inquiry process of this study was recursive, as demonstrated by Figure 3.1 (Maxwell, 2009). Data collection, data analysis and knowledge construction occurring in later phases required that earlier constructions be deconstructed or reconsidered, following the process of a hermeneutic circle, the primary instrument of co-construction (Rodwell, 1998). At this point, I explain the hermeneutic circle that was used to construct knowledge of professionalism with the teachers.

PHASE 1- ENTRY CONDITION

MTAC setting   Purposive Sampling   Emergent Design
Qualitative Constructivist Inquiry   Tacit Knowledge   Human Instrument

INQUIRY PROCESS

PHASE 2

Focus Group Interviews

PHASE 3

MTAC Debrief Session   Focus Group Interviews

PHASE 4

MTAC Debrief Session   Focus Group Interviews

**CASE REPORT-
INQUIRY PRODUCT**
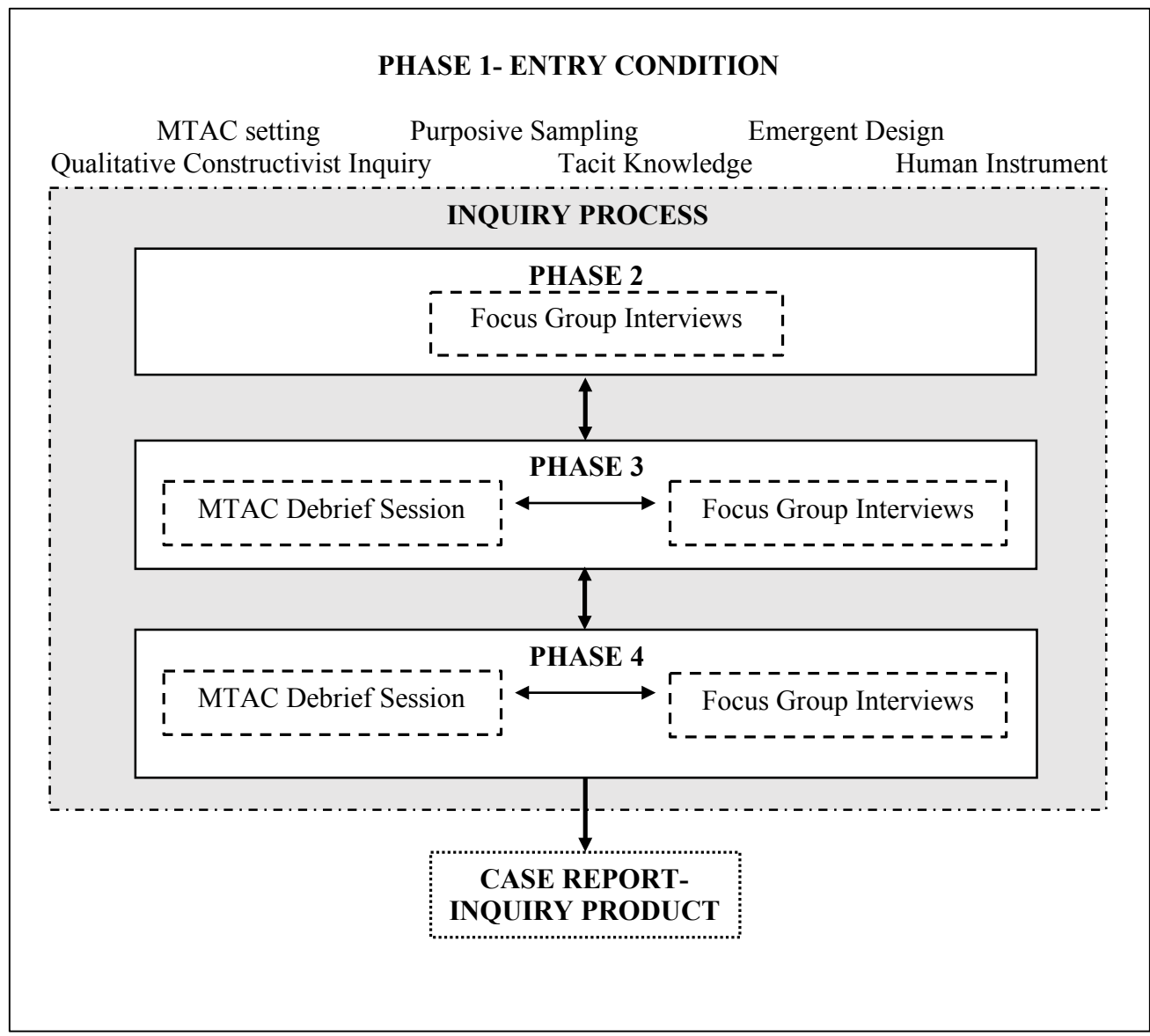
Figure 1. **Study Design**

Hermeneutic Circle

Methodologically, constructivism is grounded in approaches that seek to collect data

through a dialectic, or reflective, and hermeneutic, or jointly constructed, process (Guba &

Lincoln, 1985). Three philosophical assumptions inform hermeneutics as a strategy used in

knowledge construction (Paterson & Higgs, 2005). First is the assumption that hermeneutics has

to do with our shared understandings and the sharing of these understandings through language,

second is the idea that knowledge construction takes place through dialogue, and the third

assumption is that the researcher moves between parts and the whole of the subject, or object, of

interpretation. Fundamental to a constructivist hermeneutic circle is the hermeneutic dialectic, or

the context created around discourse of various perspectives and experiences that allow for

adjustments in individual knowledge and attitudes (Rodwell, 1998). In order to construct

knowledge of professionalism, the MTAC teachers and I engaged with various understandings

and shared experiences pertaining to the concept of professionalism through a dialectic process.

The MTAC teachers not only shared individual experiences to process the concepts and

questions that emerged, but we also discussed shared experiences as citizens, individuals

involved in the school district, and members of the MTAC. The variety of stories allowed for a

nuanced consideration of the knowledge that was being constructed as certain individual stories

required a collective revisiting and reassessment of our previous assumptions and taken-for-

granted understandings.

Hermeneutic circles provide opportunities for private struggles for liberation to be made

publicly visible. The circle does not need to be a physical circle, but rather must create

conditions whereby perspectives and information can be presented, considered, evaluated,

understood, rejected, or incorporated into an emerging understanding of the phenomena under

discussion or investigation (Rodwell, 1998). Variations regarding the form of hermeneutic

circles exist, and Rodwell (1998) provides examples of two forms, one "true hermeneutic circle"

in which participants are in constant contact over time, and another in which participants engage

with a circle of information over time. This study created conditions to employ both forms, as

MTAC teachers were both in contact over time, and also engaging with a circle of information over time. Through a private, encrypted group chat, as well as through opportunities to talk during the interview sessions, the MTAC teachers and I were engaged in both variations described by Rodwell (1998). Figure 3.2 illustrates the hermeneutic circle that was used as the primary methodological device for this inquiry. Not only did the teachers and I engage in a hermeneutic process during the data collection and analysis phases of this study, but I also engaged in what could be considered an additional layer of hermeneutics during the writing of this dissertation as my positionality informed my interpretations that were at play as I wrote. As it pertains to this project, my positionality was complex: having been a teacher with very concrete experiences related to professionalism, personally forming the context for this study, having built relationships with teachers over several years, and being a graduate student with a developed framework for interpreting various experiences, my interpretations, and thus the process of writing this paper were informed by a constant "checking-in" with these various aspects of my positionality. I found myself frequently negotiating my experiences in an attempt to reconcile those that came into conflict with experiences that the teachers shared. While this perhaps muddies the waters of a clean hermeneutic cycle, I found this particular personal interpretive aspect of the process to be necessary to truly engaging in a hermeneutic didactic.

Figure 2. **Hermeneutic Circle**[8]
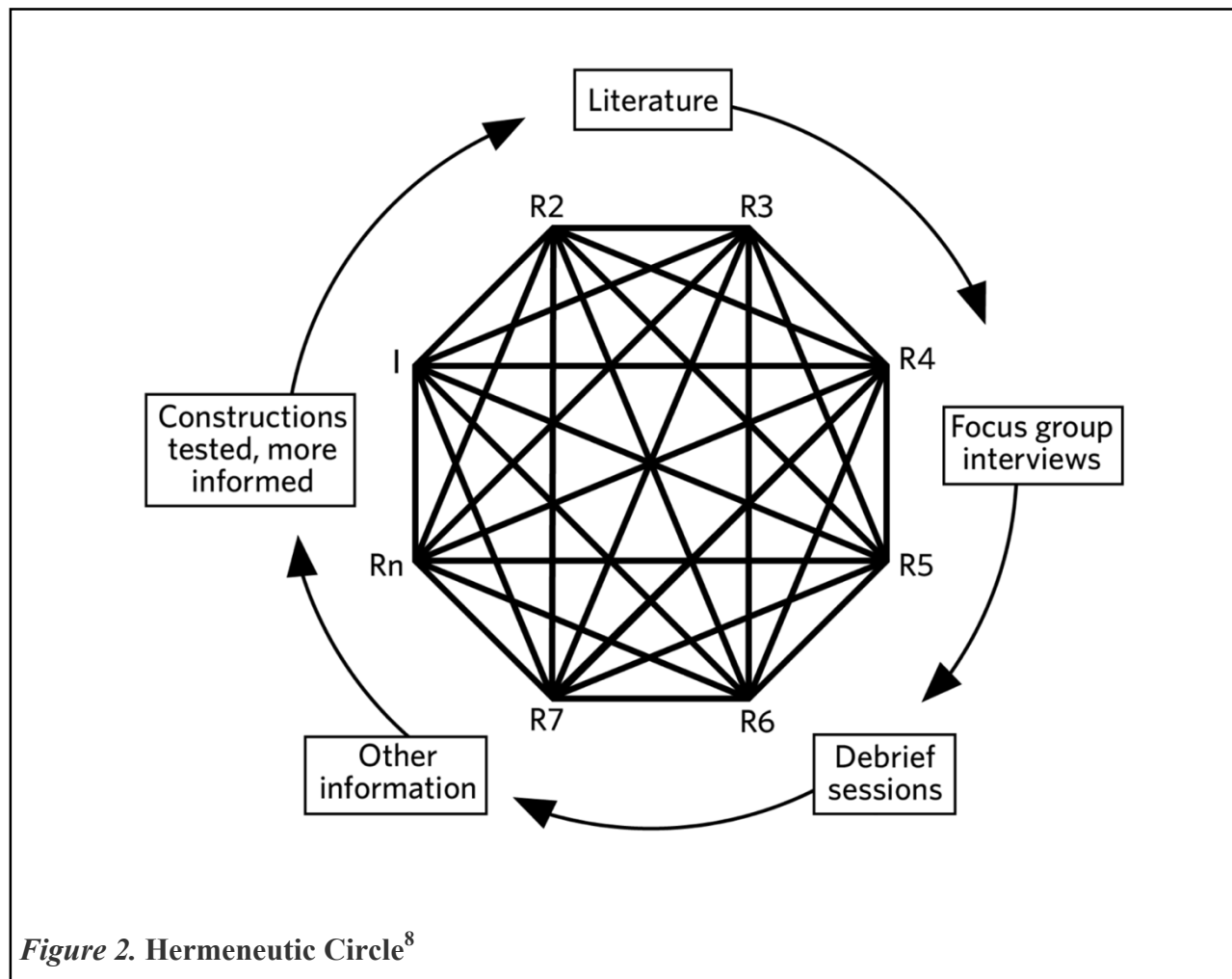
Phase One. The first phase of this study was designed to establish the entry condition of

the inquiry, or the bounded condition of the study's context (Rodwell, 1998). This included

identifying the focus of the study, based on both my prior experience and a review of the relevant

literature. This phase also included the beginning documentation of my "progressive

subjectivity" in the form of reflexive memoing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 345), as well as my

initial thoughts about the study's emergent design in the form of methodological memoing

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[8] As the inquirer, I am depicted on the outside of a hermeneutic circle with a specified differing letter, "I." However, I attempted to occupy a position as close to an equal as possible with the MTAC teachers (I, R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, Rn).

(Rodwell, 1998). During the first phase, I worked with the MTAC teachers to determine what was most salient to explore through the hermeneutic circle that was to take place during phases two, three, and four. During a regularly scheduled meeting, after I answered general questions about the study, I then made a short presentation on the major concepts of the study. The presentation was strictly conversational, but I provided the teachers with a one-page (front and back) handout of Figure 3.1, Figure 3.2, and the three concepts that would be used as a framework for this study- professionalism, agency theory, and participatory democratic theory. I asked the teachers if they had ever heard of these definitions, and aside from a general understanding of professionalism, only one teacher knew about the term agency as it related to their work. I asked the teachers in what contexts they discuss their professionalism, and decided to use the comments that emerged from that conversation as a starting point for the first focus group interview. The teachers shared various experiences including conversations with friends and family, experiences during their teacher preparation and student teaching experiences, and interactions with administrators and parents related to issues within their work. I took this information and, along with themes from the review of the literature in Chapter 2, used it to create the first round of focus group interview questions. Input from teachers through the discussions in focus group interviews and debrief sessions continued to guide the study's progression through subsequent phases. Components of phase one began, and some were even completed, prior to the official beginning of this study as the review of literature, process of reflexivity, and outline of methodology were necessary to fulfill requirements of my prospectus defense.

Phases Two and Three. The two main activities of the second and third phases of inquiry were data collection and data analysis. During these phases, a hermeneutic circle, including focus

group interviews debrief sessions, and three writing prompts to which teachers responded, was developed, and through a dialectic, data was collected. The goal of these phases was to answer the study's two research questions about how teachers' participation in a democratic space impacted their understanding of professionalism and their sense of agency.

Phase Four. This phase included the same data collection process as phases two and three. A distinguishing element of phase four was the culminating inquiry product, or case report, which included thick, detailed descriptions of the inquiry context, the problem, and the knowledge constructed by the group. This case report represents the answer to the primary research question of this study, and involved the development of a framework to articulate (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rodwell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) of teachers' understandings of professionalism and agency within a democratic space. Theory development resulted from analysis of data including seven focus group interviews, two debrief sessions, and three writing prompts with the MTAC teachers.

Paradigm Choice

This study employed qualitative interpretive inquiry guided by the ontological and epistemological assumptions of constructivist research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Rodwell, 1998) and modified for the study's particular research questions. I chose to use a qualitative approach to answer this study's research questions because of its fundamental capacity for exploring people's interpretations of their experiences, and understanding how people both attribute meaning to, and construct meaning of, their worlds (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A tenet of qualitative research is to see the world from the perspective of others and to acknowledge that these perspectives shape, and are also shaped by, various contexts of the study's subjects (Maxwell, 2013). Patton (1985) in a similar way, articulates the benefit of using

qualitative research to:

> Understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the
> interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself- what it means for participants to
> be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings
> are, what the world looks like in that particular setting- and in the analysis to be able to
> communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting. (p. 1).

The majority of research I found on teachers' professionalism employs qualitative methods. However, few of the studies include teachers in the sense-making, and knowledge construction regarding their professionalism. This study sought to address this methodological gap in the literature by following an interpretive constructivist paradigm. There were several aspects of this study that positioned it within interpretivism and aligned it with principles of constructivist inquiry.

First, a primary assumption of this study was that there are multiple realities, and they are relative to the individuals making sense of them (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Rodwell, 1998). Constructivists posit that: "'reality,' 'truth'…and 'fact' are all relative concepts…to the person(s) who hold particular sense-makings, constructions, or meanings" (Lincoln & Guba, 2013)[9], suggesting that teachers' sense of reality regarding their professionalism is highly relative and dependent upon their personal interpretations. While literature explores the impact of various factors on teachers' sense of professionalism and agency

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[9] This is the way ontological issues are often discussed in these constructivist projects. Really though what I am claiming is that through this project's process of knowledge construction, ways of making sense of reality are coming into being. These ways probably didn't exist prior to the experience of the dialectic experiences related to this project. It needs to be noted that this project does not directly confront the question of whether there is an objective reality among subjective knowers. In other words, this project is about the construction of understanding.

enactment, little attention has been paid to teachers' tacit knowledge- that which is not able to be stated in formal language (Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Rodwell, 1998), particularly as teachers attempt to make sense of these unspoken understandings. As professionalism occupies contested space within public education discourse (Day, 2002; Hilferty, 2008; Johnston, 2015; Sachs, 2003; Smaller, 2015), it is potentially beneficial to more fully understand teachers' realities, including their tacit knowledge. Through reflexive activities and hermeneutic circles, this study sought to explore, and construct knowledge of, teachers' realities- those which are easy to articulate, as well as those that may require new ways of consideration.

Second, this study's first research question was focused on how teachers understand their professionalism. It was grounded in the assumption that knowledge is socially constructed and the product of individual or group efforts at sense-making (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). As such, knowledge is subject to modification and reconstruction as individuals acquire new experiences, which is consistent with a constructivist epistemology (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Central to a constructivist approach is coming to an understanding of the emic perspectives of people involved in constructing these realities, rather than accepting outsider, or etic, perspectives (Rodwell, 1998). Based on the literature discussed in Chapter 2, teachers' emic perspectives have been largely missing from research up until this point, and therefore were at the heart of this study. Attending to these perspectives, constructivist research seeks to understand the context in which both the individual participants, as well as the study itself, exist (Finlay, 2002). This study explored teachers' individual sense-makings, and used them to generate collective knowledge of professionalism within a specific context. Constructivist research seeks to understand the context in which both the individual participants, as well as the study itself, exist (Finlay, 2002), as constructivists believe that individuals participating in research possess perceptions that are

continuously informed by their contexts and cultures (Patton, 1999). This study viewed

knowledge as contextually-bound, socially-constructed, and subject to reconstruction, through

the use of a hermeneutic dialectic methodology.

Third, this study's research questions suggested an inductive process of meaning-making

rather than a deductive process. Hermeneutic circles were formed by the sample of the MTAC

teachers and, following the stages of constructivist research, generated two products- descriptive

constructions and assimilative constructions (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). The iterative nature of data

collection, verification, and negotiation focused on understanding socially-constructed meanings,

and supported this inductive approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Merriam

& Tisdell, 2011; Rodwell, 1998). Via hermeneutic circles, the MTAC debrief sessions and focus

group interviews offered several opportunities for teachers to engage in critical dialogue, and

resulted in "consciousness raising and empowerment…natural results of constructivist inquiry

(Rodwell, 1998, p. 81). Using an emergent design- characteristic of constructivist inquiry- this

research attended to both a multiplicity of teacher voices, as well as teachers' changing

perspectives (Rodwell, 1998). This study also involved an inductive approach to data analysis, in

order to ensure that the findings were grounded in the study's data rather than a priori

assumptions.

Finally, this study maintained a consistent praxis-orientation (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Lincoln &

Guba, 2013; Rodwell, 1998). Change can take place within individuals when dissonance

between previous constructions of knowledge and new understandings becomes too great, and

large-scale change occurs when enough members of the group determine a new understanding

warrants action to deconstruct and reconstruct previously accepted knowledge (Lincoln & Guba,

2013). Schön (1983) suggested that at the core of professionals' behavior is the practice of

reflexivity, meaning they engage in reflection about their thinking and feeling in order to consider and potentially change their thinking. "This knowing and acting in the moment or the after-fact ruminating for future action, inextricably links knowing and doing" (Rodwell, 1998, p. 78). Through this study, participants engaged in ongoing negotiation of meaning, with an omnipresent potential for change. Thus, this approach was attentive to the authenticity feature of rigor in constructivist inquiry by focusing on change as much as construction of new knowledge (Rodwell, 1998). In short, this project sought to change our understandings of professionalism, and by doing so, made it possible for MTAC teachers to be positioned and equipped to change their social realities.

Methods

In this section, I detail methods specific to each of the four phases of this study, including sampling methods, data sources, data collection, and data analysis. Table 2 provides an overview of the particular components of each phase, as well as the data sources that were used to construct knowledge with the MTAC teachers. Although the hermeneutic circle, which included debrief sessions and focus group interviews, was the primary source of data, this study also considered data in the form of field notes, reflexive, analytic, and methodological memos, and teachers' reflective responses. This variety of data sources was necessary to detect and respond to nuanced interactions, as well as to acknowledge multiple realities (Rodwell, 1998). Additionally, the collection of these multiple data sources aided in the process of triangulation during data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). I conclude this section by discussing general methodological approaches that I used to ensure qualitative rigor and trustworthiness in this study, as well as important ethical considerations of this inquiry.

Table 1
Study Phases

Phase 1 Entry Condition	*Phase 2* Inquiry Process	*Phase 3* Inquiry Process	*Phase 4* Inquiry Process & Inquiry Product
Timeline: *1/19-2/19*	*Timeline:* *2/19-4/19*	*Timeline:* *4/19-5/19*	*Timeline:* *5/19-8/19*
Review of literature	Focus group interviews 1, 2, 3	MTAC meeting Debrief session 1	MTAC meeting Debrief session 2
Reflexivity and methodology decisions	Field notes	Focus group interviews 4, 5, 6	Focus group interview 7
Participant recruitment	Inductive data analysis (Coding and negotiation)	Field notes	Field notes
Participant overview of study	Verification/ Member check	Inductive data analysis (Coding and negotiation)	Inductive data analysis (Coding and negotiation)
Field notes	Memos (Reflexive, Analytic, and Methodological)	Verification/Member check	Verification/Member check
Memos (Reflexive, Analytic, and Methodological)		Memos (Reflexive, Analytic, and Methodological)	Knowledge construction
			Memos (Reflexive, Analytic, and Methodological)
			Case Report

Phase One

As described previously, phase one constituted the "entry condition" of this study. I

began by reviewing the literature salient to the topic of inquiry as a means of supplementing my

prior knowledge and personal experience. I also outlined a set of working hypotheses to guide

the inquiry process, including participant selection, methods of data collection, and initial data

analysis procedures (Rodwell, 1998). During phase one, I recruited and introduced MTAC

members to the relevant literature from Chapter 2 of this paper, as well as provided them with an

overview of the study from this chapter in a short presentation prior to beginning the inquiry

process.

Recruitment. I recruited teachers from the 18-member MTAC population to participate

in the study. Following IRB approval, I presented the study to all 18 MTAC teachers during a

regularly scheduled MTAC meeting, and invited them to participate. During the presentation, I

reiterated the fact that the study was optional and not a requirement of their membership on the

MTAC. I provided all MTAC members with an opportunity to participate, and asked their

permission to audio record all subsequent MTAC debrief sessions even if they chose to not fully

participate in the study (which included participation in the debrief sessions, focus group

interviews, data analysis, and case report production).

I sent a follow-up email after the meeting with an overview of the study and the consent

form (see Appendix A). MTAC members were encouraged to ask questions via email or phone. I

responded to the teachers' questions, concerns, feedback about the present study's methodology,

and incorporated what was appropriate into the research process. The group's first question had

to do with the study's intended audience, and the other questions had to do with the overall

process, including curiosity about the iterative process of the hermeneutic circle. There was

concern about the depth of involvement that I had initially envisioned for this study. The teachers

rightfully expressed concern that their involvement would have been heaviest during the Spring,

which is also most teachers' busiest time of year. Other busy times during the study would have

been over the summer when many teachers stated they would be out of town, and unable to participate. Therefore, over the next week via Zoom, we discussed participation commitments that they would feel comfortable making. These included participating in focus group interviews, which would be scheduled a month in advance, and at least three groups would be interviewed for each round. The teachers also felt comfortable replying to a Google form, or via email, with follow-up questions after each focus group round. Finally, the teachers committed to reading the case report and providing feedback as a form of member-checking. After the teachers indicated that they could not participate to the extent I had initially planned for, I decided that it would not be appropriate to refer to them as co-researchers. The reality of teacher participation in a study of this magnitude is a limitation that I discuss in Chapter 5.

Constructivist research is grounded in the idea that differences in meaning may occur based on individuals' identity, experiences, and contexts, so it was important to ensure that the participants of this study represented a variety of teacher perspectives. Based on working hypotheses (Rodwell, 1998), I sampled for variation along the following five characteristics:

- *Race.* Racial demographics were an extremely important factor during the MTAC's recruitment and selection process. The mayor's office was insistent that the variety of racial identities present in our schools was mirrored in the makeup of the council, so I would have been remiss to ignore the impact that both racial identities and the racial makeup of a council, have on teachers' experiences and understandings of their professionalism. Additionally, considering Richmond's history of racial segregation and current efforts to recruit teachers of color, as well as the way in which race is present in many aspects of public education, I felt it might inform teachers' assumptions and understandings of professionalism.

- *Years of experience teaching.* I felt that the number of years a teacher has been teaching may influence their understanding of educational issues and their lens through which they process various experiences related to their profession. I also thought that the number of years a teacher has been in the classroom may also be related to their experience teaching within different educational landscapes and experiencing different approaches to education reform, which may in turn inform their perspective of professionalism.

- *Children.* This was somewhat of a personal factor to consider, as I have a three and a half-year-old son, and as soon as I became a mother, much of my worldview changed. Several teacher-parents I know have interesting perspectives on professionalism and I was interested in understanding how having a family informs them. Also, I was sensitive to the notion that sending a child, or multiple children through school, may inform a person, and particularly a teachers' sense of professionalism.

- *Gender.* I felt that teachers' gender identities may inform their experiences with professionalism. As an example, I taught in elementary school where there were not many male-identifying teachers, so whenever a male-identifying teacher was in the school building, expectations and responsibilities often looked different. So, my thought process was that gender identity may impact how teachers are treated as professionals.

- *Level of education.* As someone who had developed a different framework for considering education as a result of pursuing higher education, I was curious how levels of education may impact a teachers' understanding of their profession and their professionalism.

Fortunately, the MTAC members were initially recruited for membership on the council based on very similar criteria to what was desired for this study. Many of the teachers represent extreme and critical cases of teachers including, but not limited to, first year teachers, teachers

who have been teaching for more than 20 years, career switchers, teachers who live in the same district in which they teach, and teachers who have taught in other contexts (districts, schools, countries, etc.). Additionally, the teachers represent the P-12 teaching force in RPS, including the various endorsements and certificates that teachers possess such as English as a Second Language (ESL), Career and Technical Education (CTE), and administration and supervision. Thus, MTAC teachers represented a purposeful maximum variation sample (Patton, 1999).

Data collection. The primary sources of data for phase one of this study were field notes taken during the introduction presentation, and my reflexive and methodological memos, which I describe below.

Field/Reflexive Journal. My reflexive journal was used to record field notes, and revelations or thoughts that occurred to me between meetings. My field notes were important as I observed MTAC teachers in the context of MTAC meetings, focus group interviews, and other times when MTAC met or was present at unplanned events. It was crucial for me to be able to reflect on the, almost daily, interactions and communications amongst the teachers. The MTAC teachers communicate via an encrypted messaging platform, and some of the conversations were fruitful in terms of contextualizing individuals' responses during focus group interviews. I came to view the messaging platform as an additional data source, however, I wanted it to remain an informal, and unstructured form of communication where teachers could support each other without limits. I recorded my personal reflections regarding moments when the teachers' messaging helped to clarify, or exemplify themes that were emerging from the focus group interviews and debrief sessions.

I used the journal to record three types of memos- reflexive, analytic, and methodological. As a human instrument of the study, it was important for me to document my

personal growth, as well as what Rodwell (1998) refers to as engaging in "reflective

conversation with oneself that investigates possible meanings from what is happening in relation

to one's own values and interests. This journal then, explores the essential relationship of the

human instrument with the method and the results" (p. 105). Reflexive memoing was important

as I attempted to bound my subjectivities as a researcher, particularly in relation to the data. I

wrote analytic memos as I began to make sense of the data and as themes from debrief sessions

or focus group interviews emerged, and therefore they proved to be extremely useful during data

analysis. I documented methodological decisions I make throughout the present study in the form

of analytic memos. These memos included my thoughts about protocol development and

adjustments, and the process of analyzing data. I wrote memos throughout the research process,

and had initially thought I would ask teachers to use journals to engage in reflexive writing.

However, following the initial presentation to teachers, it became clear that this would be too

much to ask of them as participants. Therefore, I decided to modify the form of reflection in

which the MTAC teachers would engage, which I discuss in the data collection section of phases

two, three, and four.

Data analysis. Data analysis for this study occurred in two main forms. First, data was

interpreted in an ongoing fashion throughout the four phases in order to develop a useful

framework to answer this study's research questions. Second, data was analyzed after all debrief

sessions and focus group interviews were completed in phase four in order to create the case

report.

Ongoing data analysis. Data collection took place throughout the entire inquiry process,

including debrief sessions, focus group interviews, and other interactions with the teachers. In

total, I collected data from three main sources throughout this inquiry: seven focus group

interview sessions with groups of five to six MTAC teachers, debrief sessions with the entire

MTAC following bi-monthly meetings with the mayor, and three writing prompts from MTAC

members individually. These were the primary sources from which the teachers' narratives in

Chapter 4 were drawn. However, during the research process, the teachers began texting and

using an encrypted group chat to converse as well, and these conversations became useful as

corroborating sources throughout the process. The group messages provided context and offered

insight into the group's collective tone at certain moments throughout the study. The analytic

process by which I navigated these sources was cyclical and interpretation was ongoing (Miles &

Huberman, 1994).

As soon as the first focus group interview was conducted, data analysis began. I initially

had been committed to transcribing the focus group interviews and debrief sessions by myself,

but quickly realized that the logistics of this made it nearly impossible for me to have the

transcripts cleaned and coded prior to the next interview or debrief session. So, aside from the

first group in the first round of focus group interviews, all audio recordings were transcribed by

Rev.com, cleaned by me, entered into ATLAS.ti as primary documents, and coded before the

next piece of data was collected. This allowed me to build upon knowledge from one interview

to the next, and clarify conversations while they were still relevant, maintaining the integrity and

purpose of the hermeneutic circle.

Culminating data analysis. During phase four, once all debrief sessions and focus group

interviews were completed and transcribed from their audio recordings, I engaged in the same

process of data analysis to initially identify small chunks, relationships, categories, and finally

theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I utilized primarily descriptive and process coding throughout

this process as it was important to both understand what was descriptively taking place in the

interviews, and to note teachers' active sense-making and growth throughout the interviews. I also utilized in vivo codes to maintain teachers' voices throughout.

Phases Two and Three

The primary methods used in phases two and three were the hermeneutic dialectic, including the MTAC debrief sessions and semi-structured focus-group interviews (Fontana & Frey, 1998), described previously. As constructivist research dictates an emergent design, the inquiry process was designed to allow for responsive adjustment to knowledge constructions through data analysis and other circumstances that required adjustment. However, no major design adjustments were necessary during this inquiry. The basic conceptual elements of phases two and three were established, and adhered to, throughout the project. The seven focus group interviews took place in various settings determined to be convenient by the group, including a pizza restaurant and my dining room. The focus group interviews ranged in length from 45-65 minutes. To structure the MTAC debrief sessions, the ORID method, a protocol designed to move "participants through an experiential learning process" (Grayson, 2010) including objective fact and event identification, moments to reflect, opportunities to interpret actions or words, and a discussion of decisions of how to move forward was used. The protocol adaptation was designed to facilitate the negotiation of knowledge constructed during the dialectic prior to the meetings' closure (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rodwell, 1998), and teachers were offered an opportunity to challenge or build upon the groups' interpretations and constructions through an intentional discussion that took place at the beginning of the following session. The knowledge constructed during each interaction informed the next interaction within the hermeneutic circle. For example, knowledge constructions from the last group within the first round of focus group interviews informed the hermeneutic dialectic for the first debrief session. The knowledge

constructed during the debrief session in turn informed the first group of the second round of

focus group interviews, which then informed the second group of the second round of focus

group interviews, and so on.

Data collection. The primary data that was collected during phases two and three were

the audio recorded and transcribed debrief sessions and focus group interviews. Entries from my

reflexive journal, and field notes taken during the hermeneutic dialectics were also used to

supplement the data from the circle itself. Below, I describe each of these sources.

Debrief sessions. This study included two 45-minute debrief sessions following each

MTAC meeting with the mayor (April and June). These sessions included between 16 and 12

MTAC members, April and June respectively, and were audio recorded and transcribed. During

these sessions, teachers engaged in a structured discussion following the ORID protocol

mentioned earlier. Through this protocol, the group was able to share both objective events and

statements from the meeting, but they were also offered opportunities to share their personal

interpretations of those same events and statements as well as to decide how to move forward as

a group. share and discuss their sense of the meeting, and the work in which the group engaged.

Throughout this conversation, teachers were also prompted to discuss how they felt their

professionalism was considered during the meeting and any changes to either their understanding

of professionalism, or their sense of agency. The purpose of these sessions was two-fold. First,

teachers' tacit knowledge, which according to Rodwell (1998) is an important component of

constructivist research, was fresh in their minds, and allowing time immediately following the

MTAC meeting may have increased the likelihood that such knowledge was shared in the

hermeneutic circle. Second, during these sessions, MTAC teachers were in the natural setting of

the democratic space, which is a necessary element within constructivist research as reality

cannot be understood in isolation of its context. As Rodwell (1998) reminds us, "[t]he wholeness of what is real is only understood when attention is given to the factors that shape the environment, the patterns of influence that exist, the values that are accepted, and so forth" (p. 55).

Instead of asking teachers to use journals to reflect on open-ended prompts at the beginning and end of each meeting and focus group interview, after the first and second round of focus group interviews, I sent teachers a link to a Google form that had five short-answer questions related to topics that had emerged during the interview sessions. The questions were broad enough that even if individual teachers had not attended to focus group interview to which a question pertained, they would be able to address it. As follow-up, the Google form questions asked teachers to expand on specific conversations that took place during the interviews. I also sent an email with three short-answer questions to which I asked the teachers to respond after all of the focus group interviews and debrief sessions were completed. Teachers responded directly in the Google form for the first two reflections, and replied directly to my email for the third reflection.

Focus group interviews. Focus group interviews are consistent with an emergent design of constructivist research as participants' ideas are mutually shaped by others'. This engagement with others' ideas and "sparking" of new considerations are also consistent with the hermeneutic dialectic of meaning making (Rodwell, 1998). The focus group interviews for this study followed a semi-structured format, and were therefore, responsive to participants' contributions. Each focus group was composed of five to six MTAC members based on their availability, and the number of groups in a round depended on which MTAC teachers were available to participate on the offered dates. The purpose of the focus group interviews was to consider ideas

brought up during the MTAC debrief sessions related to teachers' professionalism in a deeper way than was possible during the debrief sessions, as well as to follow-up on ideas that emerged from other focus group interviews. The focus group setting is congruent with constructivist inquiry, and thus appropriate for exploring teachers' understandings of professionalism, as professionalism is a complicated topic with multifaceted concerns (Rodwell, 1998). As suggested by Kreuger (1994), the focus group interview included the following questions: opening questions that established commonalities in the group, questions that helped to introduce the topic of conversation and encourage teacher interaction, transition questions that moved the teachers to the questions of interest, two to five questions that were key to data collection regarding professionalism, and closing questions that summarized the conversation and proposed potential working hypotheses for subsequent debrief sessions and focus group interviews. The focus group interviews lasted between 45 to 65 minutes, and were audio recorded to ensure that data loss did not occur. In line with this study's constructivist stance, the interview methods were based on the recognition that the focus group interviews were not meant to extract meanings from static subjects. Instead, they were seen as opportunities to engage with teachers in an active process where meaning was made and knowledge was constructed through the hermeneutic dialectic (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Rodwell, 1998).

Field notes. Throughout the study, I took field notes based on my observations during each interaction with MTAC members, including the debrief sessions, focus group interviews, meetings or events that I attended with MTAC members in which they participate. Rodwell (1998) shares Punch's (1986) description of these notes as an "'in the moment accounting' of the events, interactions, thoughts, and feelings of those participating in the interviews or observations as they occur in context" (p. 105). My field notes served as vital records of what

took place during interactions with the teachers. I took field notes throughout the inquiry process describing what I saw in various, ongoing interactions, as well as during and after meetings and interview sessions to contextualize data gathered during each interaction. These notes offered triangulating evidence with regards to how teachers described their experiences participating in the MTAC. They also offered insight into potential topics related to professionalism for further exploration during focus group interviews and subsequent hermeneutic dialectics.

Data analysis. Data analysis for phases two and three included the exploration of the transcripts for meaningful data and relationships between them. New data from phase two, including the debrief session, focus group interview, and any memoing was compared to data collected during phase one in order to create the first wave of knowledge construction. All documents were entered into ATLAS.ti in chronological order, so that I could keep track of the process through which themes emerged. First, using descriptive and process coding, I unitized the transcripts into the smallest recognizable "chunks" possible in order to code the data by comparing the units and categorizing them. I developed and affixed codes based on both my conceptual framework, as well as through themes that emerged from the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Broad codes such as "professionalism" used initially were given sub-codes that characterized them more specifically for use in later data analysis. This was all done with the goal of selective coding, or determining core categories for analysis and eventual knowledge construction. Through these coding methods, I was able to identify themes that emerged through field notes, debrief sessions, focus group interviews, and in other interactions with the teachers throughout the course of this study, and helped to inform the study's emergent design. I documented this analysis through reflexive, analytic, and methodological memoing, and also noted modifications made to the interview protocols and adjustments to the working hypotheses

throughout this inquiry. This type of analysis was critical to a constructivist inquiry, as the inquiry itself informed, and was informed by, the ongoing hermeneutic dialectic and constructions that emerged as a result of the process[10].

I analyzed and coded the data individually, and then presented the initial findings to the teachers prior to the construction of follow-up interview questions and topics that they wanted to discuss during the debrief session. I recognized that the teachers were extremely busy, and correctly assumed that they did not have time to engage in the process of coding and analyzing the data in Atlas.ti. I did request that they provide me with feedback and suggestions for modifying the debrief session focus group interview protocols. The teachers were also asked to reflect on the findings through various writing prompts via Google forms provided during these phases.

Phase Four

Phase four began identically to phases two and three, informed by the previous knowledge constructions and methodological adjustments, but diverged following the member checking stage. Once teachers approved phase four's interpretations and constructions, the final stage of knowledge construction began in the form of creating the case report.

Data collection. The sources of data for phase four were identical to phases two and three. It was only during the data analysis stage that this phase employed different methods.

Data analysis. As described in the data analysis section of phases two and three, the culminating data analysis process involved the creation of a case report that represents the knowledge constructed as a result of the inquiry process. Multiple drafts of the case report were written in order to establish and sufficiently elaborate on the constructed knowledge (Rodwell,

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[10] For an example of the process by which themes emerged from the various data sources and ongoing memos, see Appendix C.

1998). As teachers provided feedback on the knowledge constructions that emerged from the hermeneutic dialectic throughout the inquiry process, they were also invited to help write the case report, however, none of the teachers participated in the production of the case report due to time constraints. As predicted according to the study timeline, data analysis took place during Spring, and teachers were busy with standardized testing and other end-of-year school functions. So, I created the case report, and invited the teachers to provide me with feedback via edits to a shared Google document. Once the teachers were satisfied with the status of the case report, I sent the draft to a fellow doctoral student in the field of Education, for initial feedback on general readability, and then back to the teachers for a final member check.

Ethical Considerations

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) remind us that "[t]o a large extent, the validity and reliability of a study depend upon the ethics of the investigator" (p. 260). Ethical considerations played a central role in the design of this study and the methodological approaches I utilized. Throughout the process of planning this study, I attempted to pay careful attention to ensuring that the teachers had every opportunity to influence the research process, while also attending to their already busy lives and professional work. I know from experience the tension between wanting to be involved in important work and knowing I do not have any spare time to give. Therefore, an important component of this study was the trust I had established with the MTAC teachers, and the degree to which this study not only maintained that trust, but also strengthened it throughout the process.

Relationships

Rodwell (1998) states that "[i]n constructivism, the inquirer and the object of inquiry interact to influence one another to such a degree that the knower and the known are inseparable"

(p. 29). While for the purposes of my study I take issue with Rodwell's (1998) characterization

of a "knower" and a "known" as it implies differential positions within the research process, I

appreciate the idea of inseparability as it relates to constructivist research relationships. I am

particularly fond of its alignment with Dewey's notion of transactional intersubjectivity in which

both parties in an interaction, or in this case, an inquiry, emerge reciprocally changed due to the

interaction itself. Professionalism is not a concept that seems to have a single knower or a single

known, so throughout this study, I approached the teachers' professional experiences and

perspectives as invaluable to the process of constructing knowledge with them. Rigorous,

qualitative research ensures that the relationship between the investigator and participant is

reciprocal in nature, and by positioning myself and the MTAC teachers as equals prior to this

study, I believe I was able to break down any power imbalances that are inherent in traditional

research practices. In addition, I am fortunate to have had time to establish relationships with the

MTAC teachers as I was responsible for recruiting and recommending them to the council.

　　　　Over the seven months of this study, one teacher lost a student, another teacher lost a

spouse, and several other teachers experienced difficult moments that the group really supported

them through. This support manifested not only through the group chat, but also in the form of

cards, individual text messages, and even physical presence at events and services taking place in

the teachers' lives. As a group, we bonded over memes, jokes about the constant chaos within

the district, and just general ongoing communication. A fellow doctoral student, when I told him

about this group, the relationship we have formed, and the way we communicate responded with,

"Oh, so you all have a virtual teachers' lounge." I would say that while this description seemed

overgeneralized at the time, we did collectively form a space that functioned as a catch-all for

conversation, but it ended up being more than that. As a group we seemed to form a bond that

created a safe space for us to open up both personally and professionally. Since last year, we have worked together and built a trust that I believe allowed me to collect rich, meaningful data without the teachers censoring what they shared.

Consent

Prior to conducting the first debrief session, I shared consent forms (see Appendix A) with all the MTAC teachers. I should say prior to explaining the process by which I ensured consent, that all 18 teachers agreed to participate to the full extent of this project, minus the data analysis process.

The purpose of the consent form was two-fold. First, had any MTAC teacher wished to not participate, there was an option for them to opt-out, but to provide their consent to audio-record and transcribe the debrief sessions that were used as a source of data. MTAC teachers who did wish to participate, were asked to indicate consent to full participation, including debrief sessions and focus group interviews. I was sure to reiterate that their involvement was completely optional and their membership in the council was in no way affected by their decision. The second purpose of the consent form was to share the overall purpose of the study including the following components: a brief description of the research and a summary of expectations for participants' involvement, potential risks and discomforts, potential benefits to participants and others, insurance of confidentiality, and emphasis about the voluntary nature of participation.

Confidentiality

Protection of participant confidentiality is imperative in any research, but the nature of the study required particular attention to this element as there was potential for the identification of participants if not considered thoroughly. Richmond's Mayoral Teacher Advisory Council is

an unprecedented group, and while there is value in exploring the context for its unique

characteristics, there were potential risks for teachers involved. Having personally experienced

retribution from individuals in power, I am sensitive to any situations when others may be at risk.

Therefore, I was careful to consider how best to protect the confidentiality of the teachers and

took several steps to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. It was futile to use a pseudonym for

the city in which I work and attend school, as well as the name of the group as a whole.

However, there were options for protecting the identities of the teachers, and ultimately I decided

to leave individual and school names entirely out of the case report and discussion of the data.

Names and identifying information were eliminated throughout the research process, including

data collection of field notes, memos, and transcribing, as well as data analysis including all

versions of the case report. I also reported findings in the aggregate when possible so that themes

were presented as emerging from the group as a whole. As there were instances of important

individual comments, individual voices appear throughout Chapters 4 and 5, however, no names

were attached to the findings. I recognized the importance of masking the teachers' identities and

did all that I could to protect them during this study.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Trustworthiness, according to Lincoln and Guba (2013), refers to the overall "quality of

an inquiry, and specifically addresses whether the "findings and interpretations made are an

outcome of a systematic process, and whether the findings and interpretations can be trusted" (p.

103). Lincoln and Guba (2013) define two categories of trustworthiness criteria: one category

that corresponds to the validity criteria of positivism and another category that is reflective of

processes inherent to naturalistic (constructivist) inquiry. Rather than using the positivistic

concept of "validity," as this study followed a constructivist approach it is more appropriate to

consider how I established the "trustworthiness" of my findings (Hays, Wood, Dahl, & Kirk-Jenkins, 2016).

Prolonged Engagement

Prolonged engagement with participants is necessary for effectively conveying their experience (Miles et al., 2014). Built into the design of the MTAC has been a year-long timeframe, which allowed for sustained engagement with the MTAC, even separate from this study. Because we engaged in two rounds of hermeneutic circles through the MTAC meeting debrief sessions approximately every other month, and meeting between those sessions for focus group interviews, I was able to collect data and prolong my engagement with the teachers over the Spring semester and into the Summer. Additionally, by engaging in member checking with the teachers, I was able to maintain ongoing communication beyond the phase of data collection and throughout data analysis.

Triangulation

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), triangulation involves collecting data from multiple sources of the same type to determine if different sources present consistent information. Triangulation allows qualitative researchers to use different sources of information to ensure accuracy of the data, reinforce conclusions, and indicate negative cases (Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Tracy, 2010). For this study, I collected multiple sources of data including data from two debrief sessions and three rounds of focus group interviews, as well as ongoing observations, field notes, reflexive journals, and memos. This collection of evidence allowed for in-depth knowledge, and nuanced knowledge construction, in addition to the confirmation of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

Member Checking

In qualitative research, the process of member checking seeks input from participants about research claims reflecting their perspectives, granting them voice, and by extension power, in the research process (Lincoln, 1995). Member checking involves verifying the collected data and corresponding interpretations and analyses with the individuals that it purports to represent (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I engaged in member checking at multiple points during this study. Teachers were offered opportunities at the end of each interview, as well as at the beginning of each subsequent interview to member check the constructions of knowledge related to their professionalism forwarded by themselves or their fellow MTAC teachers. At the end of each phase, we took time to verify that the constructions were accurate and maintained the integrity of the teachers' voices. Teachers were provided with a handout with the thematic constructions from previous sessions, and they had time at the beginning of each new session to revisit previous constructions. The teachers also had an opportunity to member check the case report for accuracy in the final stage of data analysis. This process extended the collaborative nature of the qualitative research methodology by including the teachers not only in the process of data collection, but also in its analysis and reporting (Tracy, 2010).

Researcher Memos and Reflexive Journals

In order to attend to the accuracy of data and seek to ensure that it effectively captures the experience of their subjects, qualitative researchers may engage in memoing (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tracy, 2010) and processes of reflexivity (Rodwell, 1998). I used memoing extensively to document emerging thoughts and considerations pertaining to the inquiry process, methods, and analysis. During and following every interaction with MTAC members I reflected upon, and incorporated into, memos and reflexive journal entries. I also took extensive field notes to ensure that I provided accurate accounts of events and interactions throughout the

inquiry process. Engaging in this process also allowed me to document and unpack my personal biases as they pertained to my interpretations and analyses of the data (Maxwell, 2008).

Thick Description

Providing thick description allows qualitative researchers to more accurately attend to the context in which inquiries exist (Onwuegbuzie, & Leech, 2007). As Lincoln and Guba (2013) explain, thick description entails "providing enough details of the context of the research study in order to help a reader determine whether or not the findings are transferable to the reader's context" (p. 109). MTAC meeting debrief sessions, in-depth focus group interviews, a large collection of field notes, and observations of various hermeneutic dialectics, provided me with substance for not only thick, in-depth descriptions of teachers' engagement in a specific democratic space, but also their process of knowledge construction and a way to tell the story of teachers' experiences related to their understandings of professionalism. Rather than seeking to make generalizable claims about teachers and their work, this study sought to credibly articulate teachers' understandings of, and experiences with, their professionalism.

Authenticity

Authenticity is a key element of the constructivist paradigm of qualitative inquiry, and it requires the researcher to be clear about his or her own perspective as it may potentially influence the construction of knowledge being presented in the study (Lincoln, 1995). Constructivist inquiry involves the active and dynamic construction of knowledge through interaction between researchers and participants (Tracy, 2010). Ensuring an authentic study empowers the participants of a study by prioritizing their input throughout the inquiry process, and affording them the opportunity for their voices to be heard in the research (Mcleod, 2015). One of the ways that I attempted to accomplish this in the present study was to focus interactions

with MTAC teachers on sharing their individual and collective constructions of knowledge, and then working to construct new knowledge based on the variety of experiences rather than extracting knowledge from them and describing it. I was also transparent about the research process by maintaining open communication with participants and answering any questions they had along the way. Engaging in member checking also enhanced the authenticity of the study by making sure that the interpretation of the data was not solely my own, but rather the result of shared constructions. This study sought to ensure an authentic presentation of the experience of participants by considering them as equals and engaging them throughout the process.

Conclusion

As this chapter has outlined, this study sought to construct knowledge with teacher-members of the MTAC in order to answer its research questions and explore the potential for this methodology to impact teachers' understanding of professionalism and their agency development. Using the aforementioned methods, data sources, and steps to establish trustworthiness, I strived to conduct rigorous and credible qualitative research. The goal of this interpretive constructivist study was to offer new constructions of knowledge of how teachers understand and experience their professionalism, and determine how a democratic space such as the MTAC impacts teachers' professional experiences and development, as well as enactment of their agency.

CHAPTER 4: Findings

Introduction

"Ideologies of professionalism can be made to serve the interests of the state for control and containment of teachers or they can be effectively deployed by teachers to improve their terms and conditions of service…" (Grace, 1987, p. 195)

My primary motivation behind both conducting this study and creating the Richmond Mayoral Teacher Advisory Council (MTAC) was to provide a space for teachers to engage in conversations about their work. Providing a space for teachers to make sense of their professionalism within a complicated educational landscape was, and remains, of utmost importance to me. The potential for this research to serve practitioners' interests by deepening common understandings of their work is exciting, and my hope is that it will, in fact, serve that end. The above quote represents the contested space of teachers' professionalism (Day, 2002; Hilferty, 2008; Johnston, 2015; Sachs, 2003; Smaller, 2015), reminding us that the implications for this work are great. What follows are the findings of this study based on an analysis of co-constructions made with the MTAC teachers through a series of interactions over the course of seven months. In this chapter, I present my constructivist analysis of interviews, debrief sessions, and written responses from 18 teachers on the MTAC focused on their sense of professionalism and agency. Interestingly, the bulk of the findings presented in this chapter are more related to teacher professionalism and agency than democratic spaces. I reflect on why this may be the case in Chapter 5.

Each of the three major sections of this chapter present various constructions that were developed throughout this inquiry process. First, through a visual representation, I share and

discuss the framework that I developed based on major thematic findings and relationships between themes of this study (Charmaz, 2006). Second, I present a case report that thematically addresses the two research questions that guided this study, while also exploring in more depth several core themes represented by the framework. Research question #1 was "How do teachers participating in a democratic space make sense of their professionalism?" Research question #2 asked "How does teachers' participation in a democratic space impact their sense of, and ability to enact, agency?" The case report is based on a hermeneutic circle composed of seven focus group interviews, two debrief sessions, and teachers' responses to several written prompts as follow-up opportunities to expand upon themes generated during focus group interviews and debrief sessions. The prompts, did not generally provide any data more generative than what was collected in the in-person interactions. Third, I synthesize the constructions made throughout this inquiry into succinct lessons that may be used by practitioners and individuals interested in supporting teachers' active participation in discourse about their work.

Explanation of Conceptual Framework

What follows is a brief overview of Figure 4.1, a visual representation of the Moral Professional Agency (MPA) framework that I developed based on teachers' constructions of knowledge throughout this study. In short, the framework explores missing connections between terms central to this study as well as to situate these terms and ideas within contexts to which teachers often referred. Taking this idea one step further, this framework proposes that conversations regarding teachers' professionalism should consider the role that their agency plays in their work. Additionally, it calls into play teachers' morals and the values imbued in everything that they do, in addition to the morals associated with the profession of teaching itself.

The MPA framework addresses relationships between teachers' morals, professionalism, and agency within a complex educational context. Not only does the framework address these three concepts individually, but it also acknowledges the implication of two-concept interactions, and a three-concept interaction. It is this three-concept interaction that distinguishes this framework from existing frames of thought regarding teachers' work. A teacher with a disposition representing this three-concept interaction may move through, and act on, the world differently than a teacher whose disposition embodies any number of two-area interactions, or individual concepts within the framework.

Surrounding the figure are four layers that represent the multiple influences on teachers' work. They suggest the highly-contextualized nature of teachers' work, and highlight the importance of acknowledging these contexts in discourse about professionalism. The outermost layer is the Tertiary Social and Political Context (TSPC), which includes federal entities, departments, organizations, and policies (e.g. ESSA, or the Secretary of Education). The Secondary Social and Political Context (SSPC) includes state entities, departments, boards, organizations, and policies (e.g. the Virginia Board of Education (VABOE) or the Standards of Learning (SOLs)). The Primary Social and Political Context (PSPC) includes local school boards, district administration and departments, organizations, and policies (e.g Richmond Public Schools' School Board (RPSSB) or a district superintendent). Finally, the closest layer is a teacher's Immediate Context (IC) which includes their school, grade level, classroom, and other tiers within their school building (e.g. 4th grade team, Science department, individual school Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs)). Each context also includes the wide array of ideologies that influence political and social agendas.
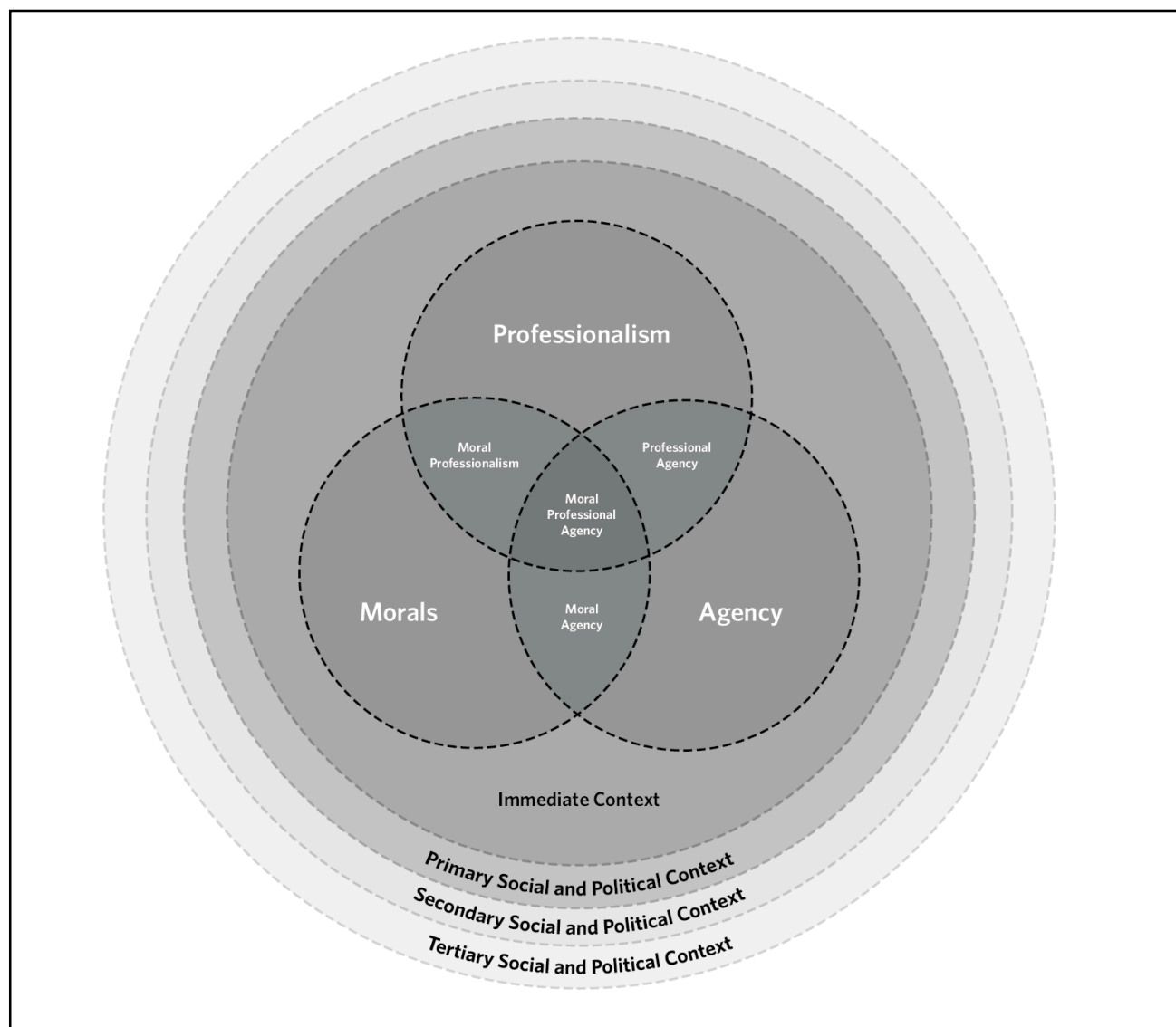
Figure 3. **Moral Professional Agency Framework[11]**

Any activity within one layer can prompt a reaction from another layer, or from multiple layers depending on its nature. For example, say the federal Secretary of Education proposes a budget severely cutting funding for athletic programs in public schools in order to supplement funding for test preparation. The VABOE may in turn request additional funding from the

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[11] I am introducing the framework at this point in the chapter in order to provide a visual reference for the case report. I will refer back to the framework throughout the chapter.

Governor for athletic programming to counter this cut. If the Governor fails to provide this

funding, the local school boards may have to attempt to find additional money to provide

extracurricular athletic opportunities for students. Most likely, the school districts, already

financially starved will not be able to locate these funds, and so local PTAs, or philanthropic

partners will have to step in. Then, the teachers will generally be required to take on additional

responsibilities to plan for how this programming will fit into the day, and in some cases, will be

the ones facilitating the programs. All of this action and reaction impacts how the public views

the public education experience, and in turn may cause a teacher to reevaluate their sense of

professionalism. Additional examples of such actions and reactions[12] will be shared during in the

Case Report and discussed in more depth in a later section of this chapter.

Although not indicated on the physical framework, I also acknowledge that education,

and teachers' work in particular, is impacted by the convergence of sociopolitical and

sociocultural pressures including social (national, local, and individual) attitudes toward

schooling and various political policies. For example, in Richmond media portrayal of Richmond

Public Schools impacts public opinion of the education system and thus teachers' ability to enact

their personal sense of professionalism in their daily practice and lived experience.

The three large intersecting circles represent professionalism, agency, and morals, and

form the primary framework for this theory. The circles' dotted lines suggest that teachers'

professional, moral, and agency development, as well as the persistence of these concepts, is

informed and influenced by teachers' multi-layered context. However, the dotted lines also

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[12] It is worth noting that teachers tend to be viewed as recipients of these actions and reactions, but this framework suggests there is potential for the creation of spaces of participation access points in which teachers can engage at various levels.

remind us that teachers have the potential to influence their contexts in return[13].

Based on the MTAC teachers' responses throughout this study, the concept of professionalism necessarily interacts with concepts of agency and morals versus my initial assumption that professionalism served as an overarching concept. As was discussed in the introduction of Chapter 1, teachers are increasingly activated by the current educational and political landscape; therefore, it makes sense that their morals and agency exist in constant conversation with their professionalism. The MTAC teachers possessed a heightened consciousness of their agency and the important role that it plays in their work, particularly considering the deep personal and professional morals that they expressed throughout this inquiry.

Three concepts- moral professionalism, moral agency, and professional agency- emerge at the intersections of each of the larger circles. While the relationships have never been articulated as they are in this framework, these three-concept interactions are discussed, either by name or in-spirit, by scholars within the existing literature base (Campbell, 2003, 2014; Santoro, 2018; Sockett, 1983, 1995; Toom, Phyältö, & Rust, 2015), and thematically emerged over and over again in the stories that teachers shared throughout the study. Because the intersecting terms obviously represent the confluence of their two parent terms, there may be a logical tendency to assume that the interaction always embodies a complementary nature. However, based on teachers' experiences that they shared during interviews, this is not always the case, and remains the source of dissonance in their professional work.

Moral professionalism is a theme that refers to the idea that teachers' professionalism is

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[13] This idea will be discussed as an implication for this framework's application to policy, practice, and research.

grounded in, and can be expressed through, a set of morals, and that this morality is central to teachers' work. Borrowing from Campbell (2014), moral professionalism refers to the "applied ethics embedded in the real-life practices of teachers" (p. 85). Relatedly, the term moral professional, then, refers to a teacher's identity as a professional, grounded in a set of morals central to the profession itself, and applied in their daily work. Moral agency is defined by Sockett (1983) as "nothing very fancy- simply, [the idea] that a person considers the interests of others, does not make discriminations on irrelevant grounds, and has a clear set of principles or virtues in which he or she believes and on which he or she acts" (p. 108). The attention to action is what differentiates moral agency from moral professionalism. Professional agency was a term that came up as the MTAC teachers spoke about the "ability to act in new and creative ways, and even to resist external norms and regulations when they are understood to contrast or conflict with professionally justifiable action" (Toom et al., 2015, p. 615). These concepts will be discussed in more depth in the case report that follows.

Moral professional agency, the three-area interaction, is a concept that emerged from the convergence of themes of morality, professionalism, and agency in teachers' stories and expressions of their work. This term attends to the interrelatedness and interdependency of the three terms on each other. Simply put, moral professional agency refers to the notion that teachers consider their professionalism to be grounded in a set of morals, and this fundamental morality informs a predisposition to act. It is important to note that action, while necessary can exist in a variety of ways, and lead to a variety of actions. The MTAC teachers' stories demonstrated various ways that action grounded in their professional morals manifests in their work.

Case Report

Introduction

My interest in how teachers participating in a democratic space understand their

professionalism and agency emerges from the decade I spent as a classroom teacher as well as

the past several years I have spent organizing and empowering teachers in the community. As a

classroom teacher, I was not aware of opportunities where I could participate in conversations

about my work, so while I often felt a disconnect between my professional values and what I was

being asked to do as a professional, I had no way to address it effectively. Therefore, it has been

my goal to educate teachers about, and increase their involvement in, spaces designed to elevate

their voices in decision-making conversations about teachers work. This has led me to wonder

what impact these spaces and opportunities have on teachers' understandings of their

professionalism in addition to their sense of, and ability to enact, their agency.

In this section, I present my synthesis and interpretation of stories told to me by 18

members of Mayor Stoney's Mayoral Teacher Advisory Council (MTAC). The MTAC's

experiences and views informed the development of a conceptual framework that brings together

themes of teachers' morals, professionalism, and agency, highlighting the importance of

interactions taking place between the three concepts. Through teachers' comments and stories,

this case report explores the concepts that informed the development of a conceptual framework

as well as themes related to each. Rather than creating composite characters to present

experiences, I preserve the teachers' individual identities and voices, while maintaining their

anonymity, because each teacher represented a unique perspective and set of experiences that

were both central to their selection on the MTAC, and crucial to this study's design and

intention. For clarity of reading the case report, when I say "teacher" or "teachers," I am

referring to an MTAC teacher, or MTAC teachers, but for the sake of unnecessary repetition of descriptors, I will drop the MTAC label. My voice also appears throughout the case report as I present introductions to each teacher's comments, provide transitional comments, and thematically interpret or contextualize comments.

As I discussed in Chapter 3, the quality of this case report should be evaluated according to the concept of trustworthiness within a constructivist paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rodwell, 1998). In other words, an appropriate critique should focus on the credibility and transferability of what follows, versus a focus on validity or generalizability of findings. The case report will include thick descriptions of experiences and ideas in order to both capture the content, and convey the moments that the teachers and I spent together exploring the topic of their professionalism.

One final note about the case report: While the thematic presentation of this study's findings may appear orderly, the process by which the MTAC teachers and I arrived at our final constructions of knowledge regarding professionalism was less so. Several of the initial questions I hoped would generate fruitful discussions about teachers' work failed to further our understandings, fizzling out almost immediately. On the other hand, several themes emerged at what seemed like the same moment, and we were able to expand upon them in ways that left me awe-struck. In many ways, this process illustrates both the great potential, and the less-than-straight-forward-nature, of constructivist inquiries.

Teachers' Understandings of Context

The first research question guiding this study asked "How do teachers participating in a democratic space make sense of their professionalism?" To begin, I feel it is important to acknowledge that throughout this project, the MTAC teachers had a lot to say regarding their

professionalism. The stories that they shared with me, and the ways that they spoke candidly about their work left me emotional and humbled, at the end of each session. Spending time with this group of teachers reminded me of why I began this research, and for that reason, among so many others, I am forever grateful to them.

From the outset of this inquiry, I entered with assumptions based on both a review of the literature and my personal experiences, many of which were addressed throughout this process. For example, because of my personal experience and knowledge as a teacher, I assumed that the teachers in this study may not be able to identify problems manifesting in the educational context within which they work, and therefore I imagined them articulating a narrow perception of professionalism. However, this thinking was extremely limited. During interviews, while teachers did not articulate exact names of policies informing the issues they see in their work, they did seem aware of the impacts of such policies. When discussing the broader educational context, teachers were quick to point out common narratives that inform the local conversation about the condition of schools. One teacher started by describing the teacher shortage crisis:

> *The state the entire year was down a thousand teachers, I think. Yeah, it's like it's only*
>
> *going to get worse. It's going to get a lot worse before it gets better.*

This teacher acknowledged that the teacher shortage crisis is not even in its most dire state- that "it's going to get a lot worse before it gets better"- illustrating a sentiment that many teachers also expressed: there is a high likelihood that schools will continue to be under-staffed because of the condition of the system itself. This line of thinking was likely grounded in a common teacher understanding of the functionality of systems and operations, which was expanded upon by this teacher:

> *And the head is a constantly rotating door at this point, from superintendents, the whole*

central office, everything. And if you're like, "oh, I need to call this person about this..."

then they're like, "Oh, no she got fired like two years ago, or she left like four years ago."

They give you this, "Oh, you have to follow the line of command," and you're like, "No,

screw the line of command." Nobody even knows what they're doing…The chain of

command has a lot of missing links.

There are a few important ideas to note within this narrative. First, this teacher is representative

of the action-oriented nature of the MTAC as a whole[14]. Throughout our conversations, the

teachers expressed that they are usually the first ones to take action if something within the

school needs to be addressed. Generally, they do not shy away from taking an issue straight to

the person who has the ability to fix it. The degree of agency that teachers expressed was

surprising to me as a teacher who, after several unsuccessful attempts to encourage colleagues to

attend school board meetings, had assumed teachers lacked efficacy and agency enough to take

control of their work. A second important observation from this narrative is how teachers

perceive the brokenness of the chain and other gaps in the system, in this case the constant churn

of personnel, to be advantageous. While the brokenness of the system may be frustrating in the

moment, viewing the missing links as openings, or opportunities, allows teachers to act.

Several teachers explained their perception that the current educational system is

dysfunctional, and made a connection between this dysfunction and other problematic trends,

particularly those related to their sense of professionalism. However, rather than diving into a

spiral of negativity and despair about ineffective systems and damaging effects on the teaching

profession, another teacher built off of the previous two statements by advocating that teachers

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[14] Later in this report, I will discuss how because of this orientation, the MTAC is able to navigate the dysfunction and focus it toward productive activity.

challenge the systems themselves. He suggested that teachers should recognize this moment as one on which they should capitalize:

> *Teachers, the dedicated people who are in the positions, we have to understand they need us a lot more, a lot more than we need them. For the longest time, I've never understood how teachers ... I mean, I guess if they have administrators that are retaliatory, but even then, people, like rise up to revolt! You have nothing to lose. Except that you have everything to lose by playing the game by their rules.*

The teacher identifies and expresses the potential opportunity in what this current moment offers. In spite of acknowledging retaliatory administrators as something beyond his control, this teacher positioned himself and his colleagues as powerful actors in the situation versus passive recipients of it. Further, the above statement includes this idea of "playing the game by *their* rules" suggesting that the teachers see the current climate as something akin to a game, or a manufactured form of reality created by "other" individuals outside of teachers. Teachers knowing the rules means that they can participate, even finding ways to challenge, or influence the rules to benefit their context.

Importance of Context and Culture

It was common for teachers to preface stories about their experiences with the disclaimer, "Well, this is true for *my* school," acknowledging both the unique context and culture at individual schools. Teachers expressed very clearly, and almost unanimously, that a central component of their professionalism was rooted in their deep, some referred to it as an expert-level, understanding of their specific school context and culture, and that mostly everything else stemmed from that knowledge. Knowing their context became a source of pride and protectiveness that thematically resonated in the ways in which the teachers shared their views

and experiences. The following quotes move from a broad understanding of professionalism related to context or culture, and then begin to address more specific components of a context:

>*When I think professional, I think expert. That's the first thing that comes to mind. You know this setting, you know the problems or maybe the lack of problems, or maybe the lack of solutions. You have good ideas because you are living in it.*

The teachers repeatedly stated that knowing a context deeply was the only way other components of a teacher's professionalism could be tapped into. They also made connections to professionalism at higher levels, and stated that if district administrators really want to learn about a school, or the communities, students, and families they are serving, they should listen to teachers, since they are the experts. For the teachers, professionalism entails recognizing that a knowledge of context is of central importance:

>*I also think professionalism is listening to the people who know the most. Just because you're higher up doesn't mean that you know more. If you come to my school, you don't know anything about my school. Ask me! And then listen and respond according to what we say.*

The teachers were very sensitive to the fact that each school is unique and acknowledged that even if one of them were to be transferred, they would have to adjust their professional approach to be sure that it fit within the culture of the school.

>*You have to know the culture. I work at (school name). Nobody can tell me there is a school like it because the culture of (school name) is different. If I went to (name different school) I can't go in with the same mentality that I can teach the same way I teach at (school name) because I have to learn the culture so I feel like that's important when we're talking about like, what teaching is.*

Building off of the above quote, another teacher added comments about how time with students in the classroom is important to truly knowing them as learners. One teacher shared a story about how she often has to defend herself in terms of how she treats her students differently.

> *My co-teacher and I had to ... And we have a great relationship. But, I think sometimes she was like, well, you let him, you allow him to do things that ... If such and such did that, it wouldn't be okay. I'm like, but we got to look at the situation and this kid. This kid. I know that this kid isn't going to be able to do A, B, and C. You're just doing this because you're just trying to get something out of the situation. With this kid, you know, it's a whole backstory and the trauma and all that. Again, for him to just walk into the room, come in, and sit down, like take his book bag off, hey, can you take your hood off? And like take it off. We just ticked off three things for today. He just got a 100 on three things that I've asked. It was just, I had to really pick my battles. I think just trying to be equitable to kids and trying to understand that sometimes trying to battle it out with these kids is not even worth it if you can get them to do some things when they're able to do them, and really, you got to choose when you're going to go into battle with it. It's hard.*

The teacher explained that the student needs something different and because she knows him on a deep level, she is able to provide that for him. Later in the interview, the teachers share their thoughts on the limitations of thinking you know a student based on data such as test scores. The teachers emphasize the importance of how being a professional means knowing "your kids" more deeply than that, and therefore, that generally means they know their students more deeply than others:

> *It is not to say that you're not an awesome instructor or an awesome engager. You just couldn't do what I do because these kids are not your kids. These are my students. I have*

had them since September. You don't even know their names. So, don't come in here all

the way from downtown with your notepad…

This teacher, attempting to assume the best of visitors, still articulates how coming into her classroom noting things about the class, and even noting things about students, does extreme violence, by disregarding the complexity of the context.

Experiences and Understandings of Professionalism

Within the literature related to teachers' professionalism, there is little consensus. This blanket assertion understates the magnitude of discrepancy between views of how teachers' work should be defined, characterized, and even valued (Bair, 2014; Friedson, 1994; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996). This lack of consensus is consistent with how teachers spoke about their work in Richmond, where this study took place. Overall, as a collective group, there was little consensus regarding what professionalism meant. Sitting at a small, buzzing pizza spot with five teachers, I asked about their first thoughts when they hear the term, "profession." There was a round of laughter, and then one of the teachers said:

> *Professionalism and being professional is like a buzz word. Because if you're not doing*
>
> *something the way somebody wants it done or the way they feel it should be done, now*
>
> *you're not being professional…It's a taboo word at this point because I don't think*
>
> *everybody has the same definition of professionalism, or even practices the same type of*
>
> *professionalism.*

Teachers described how because professionalism is a subjective term, it has the potential to be used against them; professionalism could be referred to as a double-edged sword. They shared numerous experiences in which they felt that their professionalism was the subject of either direct attacks, or regular undermining behavior. One teacher recounted an experience where each

member of his content area team was individually called into the principal's office by their administrators, asked to sit on the couch where students who are "in trouble" sit, and confronted about an issue stemming from a dress code violation. The teacher described how this experience was extremely telling about how he and his colleagues were viewed by his school administrators. Other teachers' broader expressions are represented by the following quotes:

Yeah and I think we can all think of tons of examples of administrators dressing down teachers in front of the students, or other teachers dressing down teachers in front of the students…I think that [the district]… I don't think that they view their teachers as professionals. So, I don't know why they would treat them as professionals.

And the assuming, all of a sudden coming to you and assuming you're wrong. Like, they could come up and ask you. There could be some context that could be the reason why you're acting that way and the class is the way it is. There is never any benefit of the doubt.

When asked about why they think this undermining environment exists, the teachers stated that they do not believe that they are viewed as professionals, particularly by their administrators. Something to note from the first quote is the idea that the tone set within a system, a school district, or even within a school can influence the way teaching is regarded as a profession, and in turn can influence the way teachers are regarded as professionals. One teacher spoke about how this can influence teachers' perceptions of their own work:

I mean there are plenty of people that help that particular image [of teaching not being a profession]. But it is not just Richmond. I mean it's just teachers in general that aren't considered… [teaching] is not considered a profession by so many people. It's not considered a skilled profession. You know it's like care-taking. So, since that is not

honored by many people, I think a lot of people who are in the profession are drinking

that Kool-Aid and believe that to be true, which is problematic also.

Both acknowledging that some teachers "help that particular image" by perhaps not embodying the idea of professionalism, and also noting the problematic trend of some teachers buying into a notion that teaching is less than a profession signifies the layers of conflict about the profession and those within it.

Several teachers attributed administrators' behavior to the pressures, and evaluative structures, under which they are placed. They see a principal's or administrator's behavior and even evaluations, as manifestations of system-wide control.

I agree with everything that was said. I think that they're pressured, and they have to do

things that are not even possible. Like everybody in my building had to do 20 walk-

throughs a week, each principal. Which equated to more than 100 walk-throughs week.

Like how? Then they had to say something. Because nobody's a perfect teacher so they

have to make up something. Even if you walked in and you saw a bomb lesson there had

to be some type of feedback and it was all bull.

The teacher relaying this story acknowledges the pressure that principals are under, but also sees ways that her administrators could enact their own agency. In this teacher's opinion, just because they have to conduct an unreasonable number of walk-throughs does not mean that they have to conform to the unreasonable nature of the requirement. By writing what was perceived as unnecessary feedback, the teacher then came to associate the walk-throughs as entirely pointless, when there could have potentially been merit to the feedback. This undermining of relationships is exacerbated by top-down policies within schools. The teachers also express how this doubt and insecurity often leads to administrators engaging in micromanaging:

Because you're under so much pressure and people are coming from downtown, and

going into classrooms I think the micromanaging can sometimes be seen as an insecurity.

That's how I'm starting to view it now. You watching me because you don't know what it

is that you really want from me because you haven't shown me. You haven't necessarily…

guided me to where your expectation is.

This teacher suggests how a result of the pressure that administrators are under leads to a lack of

time to both establish expectations and provide teachers with support. This teacher's reasoning

illustrates that while teachers may experience frustration with regards to the transfer of pressure,

they also recognize that it is manufactured from the top. Other teachers made connections

between the micromanaging nature of their work and the lack of trust administrators place in

teachers. They go on to attribute the control and distrust to administrators' lack of confidence

that they hired well, and that they provided appropriate support to their teachers.

Teachers are not trusted, and the people that are micromanaging don't trust themselves. I

think a lot of times central administration or administrators don't feel like they've given

enough to their teachers. Their efforts to improve their instruction don't have enough

culture and guidance. So, they figure in lieu of doing that, let me just be sure they're

doing what I told them to, because they clearly haven't been shown how to do it by

myself.

Teachers referred to checklists and evaluation systems, and shared many stories about being

micromanaged. One teacher told a story about coming in from recess after taking students to the

restroom, and walking down the hallway to find their principal at their door pointing to their

schedule, and loudly announcing in front of everyone else in the hallway, *"Your schedule says*

you have been teaching Science for four minutes. But clearly you are not, and have not been

teaching Science for four minutes." As she retold this story, I could see this teacher, a woman

who takes immense pride in her work, and has great confidence in her abilities as a professional

become very emotional. Her eyes teared up and she apologized for getting upset. Everyone

around the table immediately felt her sadness and anger. They all reached over to hold her hand,

one even got up and gave her a long, hard hug. This teacher then shared, adding to the anger we

all felt, how that day she had been assigned six additional students because her colleague's

substitute never showed. This story, albeit extremely unsettling, was not unique. Several teachers

that day, and during other interviews, shared their own stories about a general lack of

circumstantial consideration, instead focused on managerial monitoring.

Not viewing teachers as professionals, or not treating teachers as professionals was

something that came up in several interviews. One teacher shared a story of his administrator's

behavior, explaining how it was indicative of the way that his administrator viewed

professionalism, and thus the way in which she treats other professionals in the building:

> *Your job as an instructional leader is to help the people who are instructing your*
>
> *children. You getting on my back about stuff that I honestly have no control over is not*
>
> *helping, nor is it professional the way that you're doing it. My AP lacks so much tact it's*
>
> *ridiculous. Case in point, day before we got out for break, she gets on the intercom to*
>
> *buzz the academic coordinator. She says, "better yet… where are you?" You're on the*
>
> *Intercom! Like lady! What… are you doing? Like, how is that professional? And you*
>
> *have the permission, you have the right to do that because you're the AP? Like that*
>
> *doesn't even make sense to me. And then how does that sound? You don't know who's in*
>
> *the building!*

The disconnect that this teacher felt between his own view of professional behavior and his

administrator's was common among the other teachers. Overall, the teachers had little tolerance

for school leaders who exhibited what would likely be agreed-upon unprofessional behavior.

They expressed frustration about the way in which professionalism was neither modeled, nor

extended to other individuals in the building. These experiences further complicated their sense-

making of professionalism. However, teachers were in agreement about several themes regarding

their professionalism.

Moral Professionalism

Moral professionalism was the first of three concepts to which teachers in our

conversations constantly returned. It refers to a type of professionalism grounded in a set of

morals. The morality to which teachers alluded was not a complex or extensive belief system,

rather it was simple, grounded in the idea that professional decision-making is fundamentally

student-centered. This student-centered morality is essential to teachers' work. As one teacher

put it: *Yeah, you've gotta' do what's best for the kids, for the students.* Several teachers

articulated their understanding of professionalism as a conscious association with what was

going to be best for their students. For example, one teacher said, *I mean, still at the center of*

how you conduct yourself is what's going to be best for your image as a professional because of

your students. Like that's always what's driving you. This statement exemplifies the way in

which components of teachers' work cannot be described in isolation, but everything evolves

from a student-centered focus, and then expands outward to encompass other aspects of their

professionalism.

Moral Professionalism in Alignment

When teachers' contexts are conducive to consistent moral and professional enactment,

they describe an environment in which they are able to meet their students' needs. In this type of

environment, they describe feeling professionally sustained.

> *The school where I was teaching last school year was great. The principal was visible, but let us do what we needed to do in our classroom. If she had a question about our lesson, or what the learning objective was, she asked us. She assumed positive intent about our teaching. I mean, that's what you want as a teacher, right? To be trusted to do your job? Yeah, and I knew she had both the kids' best interests and the teachers' best interests at the heart. There were times when we didn't agree, but she gave us the benefit of the doubt because we knew our kids, and that was important to her. That made me feel like she valued my expertise.*

This teacher's administrator trusted the teachers, and made them feel respected as professionals. This suggests that with regards to professional treatment, teachers perceive an important relationship between having the students' and teachers' best interests at heart. The importance of maintaining a dual consideration of what is best for both teachers and students is important because of the value that teachers put on doing what is best for their students. To take this logic one step further, if teachers cannot be trusted or permitted to do what, in their mind, is best for the students, how will the students get what they need? Giving teachers the benefit of the doubt when it comes to meeting the instructional needs of their students was important to this teachers' sense of professionalism because it meant that her expertise was valued, and that her commitment to her students was validated.

Several teachers spoke about the important role that experience plays in solidifying their understanding of professionalism. Several teachers described how time shifted their perception of professionalism from being wide-ranging to more singularly focused on doing what is right for students. They described how as beginning teachers, their perception of their professionalism

was widespread and all-encompassing, often based on expectations passed-on to them by others, including how well they attend to collegial relationships, keeping in their administrators' good-graces, and managing all of the extra-curricular demands required of them. However, after gaining experience, and via the passage of time, their perceptions of professionalism focused more on what was best for their students. One teacher shared how coming from a long family lineage of teachers, he had envisioned a certain type of professionalism, but after a few years actually teaching in the classroom, his vision changed:

> *After teaching for myself, I realized that my professionalism… Yes, I have those aspects like you know working with colleagues and… making sure that I'm following through on my obligations. But now I think I view my professionalism more as how I serve my students. And I gauge my professionalism "am I doing my best to meet their needs?" Because if I'm just doing the same thing for every single child then, you know, I'm failing at my professionalism because I'm failing to see what these children need.*

This teacher described his priority, like all of the teachers, as resting in his moral commitment to students' individual needs. While acknowledging that other components of his professionalism remain, he states that overtime, what has increased in importance, compared to other evaluative components, is how well he is able to serve every one of his students, going so far as to say that if he is unable to meet every student's needs, then he is failing at his professionalism. It is important then, for a teacher's context to foster professional alignment for a teacher to remain professionally sustained.

A point that this quote brings up is that, according to the teachers across interviews, determining what students need goes beyond test scores and quantifiable data. Overwhelmingly, the teachers expressed a deep knowledge of their students' needs and abilities, and stressed that

evaluations of how well they are being addressed should take on a more holistic approach versus singularly focusing on potentially inappropriate, and in many cases uninformative, quantitative indicators of student growth.

Several teachers expressed perceived moments of misalignment between their individual perception of professionalism and their context, but they noted an ability to maintain their focus on their students, which enabled them to carry on. This demonstrates both teachers' firm commitment to, and the general power of, a student-centered understanding of professionalism:

> *But at the end of the day, regardless of all the craziness in RPS, it's about the children. So, you know as long as I keep my focus there then I know I can keep going. You know when I lose that then that tells me it's time to move on.*

> *I struggle with Richmond politics because it makes me mad. Like, it just really disgusts me with how much they play with our kids' lives, and I just take it so personal… It can get super frustrating because everyone has their own agenda, and everybody can't do what they want to do, but it's not all in the best interest of the kids. But that's like why I am here… So, that's like my motivation is the kids. Like, this is why I do what I do. So, I have to educate myself because if I don't, they're going to keep doing what they do.*

These two quotes remind us that most teachers are aware, even if it is in a general sense, of the wider context in which they teach. It also reminds us of the importance of checking-in with ourselves, and our professional condition to be sure that we are still focused on the important parts of this work.

Challenges to Moral Professionalism

One note about a student-centered understanding of professionalism: during the focus group interviews, teachers commonly acknowledged that "professionalism for the students" or a

"whatever it takes" mantra is often used against them, or to imply that for example: teachers who refuse to teach Saturday Academy or Extended Day, or do not engage in standardized testing pep rallies, or the like, are in some way less professional, or even unprofessional. A teacher's commitment to a student-centered professionalism puts them at risk of having to endure an abusive professional relationship.

A final thought: sometimes checking-in leads to checking-out. There are times in which a teacher's student-centered morality cannot compensate for the dissonance between a teacher's understanding of professionalism and their professional reality. Take for example, one member of the MTAC, who after years of dedication to the district, and several attempts to step into her leadership potential, was leaving at the end of the school year for an opportunity in another school system because she was not being cared for professionally. The teachers shared countless other stories about colleagues who left the school system, or the profession altogether because they were not being provided with opportunities to grow as professionals. This posits that while a teacher's student-centered morality can sustain them through a variety of challenges, other facets of a teacher's professionalism must also be considered and nurtured. An exclusive focus on students can leave teachers unable to enact other facets of their professionalism, either because involvement in broader professional activity may cause feelings of guilt for spending time away from actions that directly impact students, or because their action may garner negative public responses.

Moral Agency

The next two concepts, moral agency and professional agency, may at first appear to be interchangeable, but through teachers' stories and experiences, it is my hope that the nuances of each will become clear. Moral agency exists as a widely-recognized concept within the literature,

so it was important that this study consider the applicability of existing understandings for the

MTAC teachers' contexts. Of particular usefulness was Sockett's (1983) work on the moral base

of teachers' professionalism. Sockett's definition, provided earlier in this report, nicely embodied

what the teachers were sharing in their stories, so it became our working definition for use in the

focus group interviews.

Moral agency was actually the final concept to emerge through this inquiry as the

teachers processed how their morals informed, and have continued to inform, their

professionalism. Prior to the final iteration of data collection, it had become clear that morals

were going to play a large role in this study's findings, however, it remained unclear as to how

they fit into the existing framework of professionalism, agency theory, and participatory

democratic theory. So, the final round of questions sought to explore when and how particular

aspects of teachers' morality developed. Through this line of questioning, several teachers

clarified that some morals and values are extremely deep-seeded, based in their lived-

experiences even as students and young people. Other morals related to their professionalism

developed later in their life, such as during their teacher preparation, or even since entering the

classroom. As we dug deeper into questions of the teachers' morality and their professional

moral-centers, it became clear that teachers' moral agency, in many cases, preceded their

professional agency. One teacher talked about how his professional identity stemmed from his

individual identity:

> *I didn't know myself as a professional until I knew myself as a person. All of my beliefs*
>
> *and the values I live by in my day-to-day fully inform my classroom day-to-day. I think*
>
> *before I'm a teacher I'm myself. My teacher credentialing is just an addition of who I am*
>
> *as a person, so what you're going to see is me as a person, and then you'll find out I'm a*

teacher… I'm a qualified professional. But the professionalism means absolutely nothing until I get grounded in myself.

This teacher made it clear that his professionalism is important to him by following up on the teacher descriptor with "I'm a qualified professional." But he noted that the value of his credentials is "an addition" of who he is as a person, an add-on to the morals that he had as an individual before his professional status. This quote acknowledges the important process of moral development that, in many cases, takes place before teachers enter preparation programs. The morals with which teachers enter the classroom are as important to consider as the ones individuals may gain through their development as teachers.

Many teachers indicated that their moral agency was based in their lived experiences and that it often had to do with basic principles of right and wrong versus those having to do with students per se. Several teachers spoke about right and wrong in terms of justice and expressed that when they perceive something as unjust, they feel compelled to act:

Yeah, I second that. The injustice. That's when I stand up. Like when I know that I see something wrong, and I know I am in the right, I'm going to say something, or I am going to step in and do whatever I gotta do to correct it, and that's when I don't mind if there are repercussions. If I know what I did was right at the end of the day, I can fight it, and I know that if I did the right thing that I will win that fight. In one way or another. It might not look like a win immediately, but in the long run, yeah. I'd be fine with the decisions that I made.

This teacher's statement brings up an important and relevant point related to teachers' moral agency. This teacher, agreeing with another's account of seeing an injustice take place, says that when he knows he is seeing something wrong, he reacts, and will do whatever he has to do to

make it right. When discussing their moral agency, teachers seemed content with accepting any repercussions from his or her actions because of the commitment they had to their morals.

Although teachers expressed a resolve to enact their moral agency no matter the repercussions of their actions, they still articulated a sense of frustration with administrative push-back when enacting their moral agency:

> Like, it's such a fine line. Like you want to advocate for yourself, but then you do it, and especially in Richmond, the administration will push back and bully hard and it's like how'd you tread that line between making sure you're doing what's best for yourself, and for your students, which is ultimately always what we're advocating for. But then you know it makes your life a million times harder when they come back at you full force and you're targeted.

This teacher expressed a sentiment that other teachers also acknowledged: that it is often difficult to reconcile two realities of their work: the need to advocate for either their students or themselves, and the likelihood that they will be targeted for doing so. They noted that many of their colleagues, while possessing moral agency, struggle enacting it out of fear. Based on their accounts, the teachers are neither naïve, nor are they obstinate; they are simply realistic about their environment and context. The exchange below is between two teachers from different schools, who talk about their colleagues' degree of moral agency and the likelihood of them enacting it. Both teachers express a sentiment of fear preventing their colleagues from advocating:

> I feel like people have moral agency but there's a fear factor I think in some of it. Like, if you are an advocate for yourself...maybe... you may be taking a risk of reaction.

> That's interesting. That's what I was thinking... I was like, you know there's just things

people may have but with the climate, especially the climate of our school system right

now, I think people are afraid to accept it. Even if it's given to them it's just kind of like

because I don't know what's happening right now. I want to advocate for my kids but I

really can't because I don't want a negative reaction.

Based on what the two teachers discuss in this interaction, it would appear that their colleagues'

immediate contexts and individuals within them, as well as broader contexts and individuals

informing their professional work, impact the degree of agency they feel comfortable enacting.

Broadly, moral agency was conceived as a term including, but also more encompassing than

professional agency.

Professional Agency

Professional agency was a concept that emerged as teachers recalled times in which they

enacted their agency in order to address conflicts within their professional work. In order to

discuss professional agency, we must remind ourselves that teachers' understandings of

professionalism are largely rooted in doing what is right for students. Thus, professional agency

would embody teachers taking action to ensure that professional practices are good for students.

The teachers generally agreed upon the ethos of professional agency, with one teacher

summarizing it as:

I mean for me, agency in the terms of being a teacher is being able to decide for yourself

what's best for you as a teacher and what's best for the children and put that into action.

Being able to speak up and be heard if you disagree with larger decisions.

One teacher described how in moments of conflict, or during times when he wonders how to

respond, he thinks about his students and asks himself: "H*ow's that going to shape their future*

school experiences? I think when you come from that student-centered focus it kind of just

permeates everything else that you do." This teacher's articulation of his ongoing professional

inner-dialogue was representative of what several teachers shared as well. The teachers described

how this central question regarding how any decision will impact students' future educational

experiences influences everything they do, including how they react inside and outside of the

workplace. Professional agency had to do with teachers considering themselves as pedagogical

experts (Toom et al., 2015), with the addition of thinking about what is pedagogically in the best

interest of their students. Of the three concepts, professional agency was the one with which

most teachers easily identified and to which they could relate stories. It seemed that teachers felt

comfortable talking about their professionalism, and their professional decisions, whereas

discussions about their morals, and moral decision-making seemed less natural for them.

The quote below is one example of what it looks like when a teachers' professional

agency is in alignment, meaning she is able to act and resist when decisions are in conflict with

what they define as professional. This teacher was very clear that she felt she had an effective

working relationship with her administrators because they listened to teachers. She

acknowledged that while they have their flaws, she felt comfortable speaking up within, or

outside of, the school building about issues she found to be conflicting with her professional

expectations:

> *Like I said, I can talk to my principals if I have a concern about the way something's*
>
> *working in the building. Like the testing schedule. Or last year I raised a concern about*
>
> *something they were doing, the way they were moving kids from [one class] to [another*
>
> *class]. I said, "Look, I think this is a terrible idea, here's why." They still moved them, but*
>
> *it felt really good to be able to tell them that and not have them judge me or yell at me or*
>
> *go, "You're wrong" based on my disagreement. They never say anything about me going*

to the school board, like ever. The only reason they said something about this turning

into a thing is because I had them [take the lead] and it was like a collaborative thing.

Which feels awesome. In terms of making a difference at the district level, "Eh." I've

ruffled some feathers. I've gotten meetings with district people. Do I feel like it makes a

lick of difference? Not yet. But I mean at least I know that they know to watch out for me

and that I'm watching them. That counts for something I guess.

The administrative support that this teacher conveys through her story is important to note. Her administrators listen to, and respect, her as a professional, willing to engage with her suggestions and constructive criticism about ways in which things are operating at the school level. The administrators also respect her professional agency outside of the school building, as she notes they never say anything about her going to speak at a school board meeting. This is important reinforcement for this teacher to receive as a professional enacting her agency to ensure that her students' needs are met.

This next quote depicts a different scenario, but still one in which the teacher feels he must take action, and is able to enact his professional agency. This teacher is sharing testimony about an instance when he overstepped boundaries because professional expectations were being violated. What was being asked of this teacher was in conflict with his professional expectation, and thus he was not going to do what was asked of him:

And I have been guilty of drafting emails that probably should not have been drafted

because I overstepped, but at the end of the day, I feel like what you expected of me was

not going to happen only because it's not what we're [collectively] expecting. Case in

point. They wanted us to do this draft IEP thing, and the draft they gave us they told us

they wanted it to be done tomorrow, when we're trying to get into the practice of a draft

being done 10 days before a meeting. So, you're now going to tell me a day before this

draft is due that it needs to be done even though that's not best practice and at this point,

you're not expecting what you [say you] expect. Like, if you don't want me to do the right

thing for the practice, it's contradictory. Like, I'm not going to do this.

An important theme that emerged was how teachers' confidence with regards to their professionalism impacted their decision to enact their professional agency. Teachers spoke about how they knew they were the most qualified individuals to teach their students because of several factors. First, teachers spoke about their confidence in their professional preparation, one teacher speaking quite assuredly:

[I]f you don't like what I've presented to you professionally I'm also open to criticism,

and if there's something that you want me to do differently, please be sure that you can

explain why you want me to do it differently and that's anybody. I don't want it to be

interpreted as arrogance but I'm just confident in my skill set at this point because I've

been tested so much to get here, like professionally we've been through so much

individually, collectively that I'm prepared and confident. It's like, "what? You not finna

come in here and make me feel small because I'm not doing something you feel is

appropriate or you feel would be necessary to fit your philosophy.

This teacher acknowledges that he is open to criticism, but whoever is doing the criticizing should be prepared with an explanation of why. Several other teachers spoke about situations where individuals with no experience in their school and classroom come in to observe, in some cases for a very short amount of time, and then want the teachers to turn their entire practice *"upside-down because of what they saw for that brief amount of time. They didn't see the 20 minutes before or the 20 minutes after, but they think they know and that they have smart things*

to say." For teachers, knowing their context meant that they were the experts in the room. Some teachers even acknowledged that they would not know how to teach at other teachers' schools because the culture and context are different. The importance teachers attributed to a school's, and classroom's, context came up with regards to their professionalism. The context issue is important to consider in any discussion of why teachers feel confident in enacting their professional agency. For them, knowing a context is everything. For individuals to make decisions about what will happen across the board without knowing how that will impact certain schools, and certain students, is irresponsible and unprofessional. Teachers had no doubt about enacting their professional agency when decisions conflicted with what they know would be best for their students. When describing resisting, one teacher was quick to say that it had nothing to do with disrespect, but everything to do with respect for the practice:

> *Just because my principal said that, that doesn't mean I'm going to do it. Not because I'm disrespecting you but I know best practice. Respect the practice… not what is written on a paper.*

Although the above stories present an image that teachers possess and enact their professional agency, throughout interviews, teachers described how for the most part, they felt many of their colleagues lack professional agency. Several teachers expressed a sentiment akin to how:

> *I think overall, I mean some individual teachers will resist stuff, but by far and away, the majority of the teachers are just like lambs for the slaughter. They're just, they go along with it and they don't...*

When speaking about their colleagues, several teachers were sympathetic and in some cases, defensive, expressing that, *"I have seen good teachers, who would do anything for their students, not act because they are afraid to. And I am not saying this fear isn't based in truth."* This

teacher was sympathetic to her colleagues and other teachers who neither realize, nor act on their agency. She acknowledged that the fear of acting out is justified. When asked what created this culture of fear, the teachers generally attributed it to perspectives of what it means to be a professional, which again, differs depending on who you ask. In the interaction below, the two teachers discussed a common administrative perspective of what it means to be a professional:

> *And how professionalism is defined from an administrative standpoint at least the one that we're used to does… they expect you to have that fear. They don't want somebody actually taking large jumps in agency. Isn't that interesting?*

> *[Colleague response]: It's unprofessional to go against what your administrators say.*

> *Yeah. It's unprofessional to have agency.*

There were a series of conversations in which teachers discussed differences in how administrators perceived professionalism versus agentic teachers' perceptions. They included tangible expectations such as wearing dresses, stockings, or high-heels, and posting Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) daily on the board for individuals walking through at any moment. Other expectations included seemingly conflicting ideas of conforming or being polite to doing your job well. The perceptions were quite varied, but none of the teachers described any of their administrators' expectations as including advocacy or action related to professionalism, which is interesting considering all of the MTAC teachers indicated that their agency was a major component of how they viewed themselves as moral professionals.

Moral Professional Agency

Up until now in this case report, I have presented and discussed moments in teachers' work in which two concepts of their professionalism overlap. In this next section, I discuss the

concept of moral professional agency, in which three areas central to this study interact with one another. Based on what teachers discussed throughout the interviews, their morals, professionalism, and agency were continuously swirling around, intertwining in certain moments, pulling apart in others, and in some moments floating disparately on their own. The statement that follows was the one that sparked my initial connection between teachers' agency, morality, and professionalism. Something about the way that this teacher spoke about his own exact struggle with deciding to act struck me, and all of the disparate themes that lacked connectivity came together:

> *And I think also, when something weighs on me like long enough, like I feel convicted about something for long enough. So, like the um, the way that certain things are done at my school, I'll speak up. The problem is because I'm not scared of my principals, or I'm not intimidated by them because I like work with them, and I just know. Just wait until you're five years in, you're just going to be like, whatever.*

When he said "like I feel convicted enough," something resonated in me. I heard my inner voice from five years ago when I finally decided to attend and speak at my first school board meeting and speak. I had been pushed too far, and I was not afraid. I absolutely felt convicted enough to tell my story and enact my agency to fight for what I knew was right.

Other teachers shared stories in which it seemed that the three individual concepts naturally fell into alignment. It was in these moments, and through these stories, that the concept of moral professional agency took form, and became distinct from the other two-concept interactions discussed previously. The following quote was one teacher's response to being asked "what does it mean for you to be a professional?" Like most other teachers, her answer was strikingly holistic versus one that mentioned a characteristic or trait commonly attributed to

professionalism, and it seamlessly incorporated the three concepts described above:

> *To me, being a professional means thinking about what I would want for my own kids,*
> *and what is morally the right thing to do for my students, even if it isn't a popular*
> *opinion professionally. Like, sometimes it means being uncomfortable with how others*
> *might respond to your actions, and sometimes it means the decision comes naturally*
> *because it is the obvious response. Regardless though, there are times when something in*
> *the job doesn't sit right, and the only thing to do is act.*

This teacher in one small statement explains that for her, being a professional, or a teacher, means that she is able to decide what is best for both herself and her students, and then put that into action. While this teacher delivered her response with a sense of calm and composure, it is important to note that conceptual alignment within teachers' work does not guarantee comfort or ease in future decision-making, nor does it guarantee a positive reaction from others. On the contrary- particularly considering the current political and, therefore, educational climate- even if a teacher's morality is prompted by an issue within his or her professional work, and acted upon in a moral way, whoever is receiving the response may not interpret it as such.

Teachers were keenly aware of this situation. One teacher even described how she sometimes thinks about how it would be easier for her to not get involved in what might be considered controversial, albeit professionally-related issues taking place around her. She went on to explain that not being involved and informed might mean that her colleagues would not expect her to know about the latest news in the district's Central Office, or in the Mayor's Office, or even issues between the two such as budget hearings and other legislative processes. She said, *"So, like part of me is 'ignorance is bliss,' but it's not fair for me to be able to do something and not."* While acknowledging that ignorance might be a nice change of pace, she

also recognizes the importance of her work and her position in a democratic space such as the MTAC. Her statement that she is able to do something indicates that she feels a sense of efficacy with regards to enacting her agency as a professional, and as such it would not be fair for her to abandon that responsibility. Her statement indicates her sense of obligation to do something with her opportunity. Several teachers echoed this sentiment, and expanded with examples of how MTAC has impacted their work this year, particularly with regards to their sense of professionalism and agency.

Moral Professional Agency in Practice

The stories that the teachers shared exemplify the concept of moral professional agency in teachers' work. Moral professional agency refers to the notion that teachers consider their professionalism to be grounded in a set of morals and this fundamental morality informs a professional disposition to act. Consider the example from the moral agency section that I shared earlier in this chapter:

> *Yeah, I second that. The injustice. That's when I stand up. Like when I know that I see something wrong, and I know I am in the right, I'm going to say something, or I am going to step in and do whatever I gotta do to correct it, and that's when I don't mind if there are repercussions. If I know what I did was right at the end of the day, I can fight it, and I know that if I did the right thing that I will win that fight. In one way or another. It might not look like a win immediately, but in the long run, yeah. I'd be fine with the decisions that I made.*

Recall that there were two teachers, one of them agreeing with the other about feeling convicted enough to act if they witnessed an injustice. Interestingly enough, neither teacher indicated that the moral issue had to be related to a student. Both teachers spoke in vague terms about "seeing

something wrong," and "do[ing] whatever I gotta do to correct it." When I followed up with the question, "Are you talking about something immoral having to do with students?" They both agreed that it could be related to anybody and any immoral issue. Another teacher expanded on this:

> *I'm going to stand up for myself, I'm going to stand up for these kids because I'm a justice person. I'm just a justice person so it's kind of like if I feel like something is like being slighted, I feel indignant about it, I'm going to have to speak up, and that's a part of professionalism.*

This is a prime example of the common overlap between teachers' professionalism, morals, and agency. Teachers seeing something immoral taking place will enact their agency, even if it is unclear to them whether it is because of their identity as a moral professional, or just their identity as a moral individual.

Another teacher shared how common it is for her to enact her agency by bringing an issue to the attention of the administration. In this excerpt, she shares how if there is something that she perceives as not in the best interest of the students, she is going to do something to address it:

> *I want to do what's best for children. If this ain't right, this ain't right. We need to talk about it. Even… [one of] the Director[s] of Principals knows. She'll tell you in a minute, [I] will send you a three, four paragraph dissertation about the issue, and will nicely write it down and be like, "So, your thoughts? What do you think? What should we do?" She knows it's coming. She's like, I got your dissertation. Somebody's going to get something. We're going to talk about it.*

Not only does this teacher bring the issue to the attention of her administrators, but she also expects a response from them. In her mind, if something is not right, and it pertains to her

students, she is going to ensure that it is fixed. The teacher goes on to describe, jokingly, but also in seriousness, that at this point, her administrator knows what to expect from her, and the expectation from the teacher is that it will be resolved and made right.

Time and experience came up repeatedly throughout the interviews. Time was important as it built experience, and gaining experience generally increased teachers' confidence in their professionalism:

> *Sometimes I'm not always tactful because my gangster comes out. But, I try to be as authentic as possible, keep it real. But at the same time draw on my experience. Really like understand that I've been on this rodeo for 20 years. So, you can't just sell me something and just call it caviar and I know it's not. I need you to understand I know what's happening here. So, I think when people know that and you come to the table like that they kind of tend to say, "Okay I can't BS her, I need to listen to her because she kind of knows what she's talking about. Or she's bringing some experience at least to the table."*

Another teacher agreed that her moral professional agency evolved over time and through gaining additional experience. She noted that her understanding of what it means to be a professional previously entailed pleasing her principal and complying, but she described how her view has changed to encompass a moral responsibility to speak up and act when things are not right, even if it means challenging administrators' preferences:

> *Yeah, I think initially when I started teaching, my professionalism…like I was a total teacher's pet growing up. Like I wanted to do what the principal said, like you know, "Oh my gosh, like I'm so excited let me go do that…" and I think as I've kind of grown in my profession and professionalism I've realized like being a good teacher isn't about*

doing what the principal wants. It pretty much has nothing to do with that. And it's all

about what's right for the kids and kind of my own confidence in my abilities and that has

allowed me to have I guess a shift in professionalism. It's not about getting in line, it's

about doing what's right for the kids. And sometimes that means, usually that means,

being out of line, unfortunately.

This teacher's understanding of professionalism developed over time to include an important

consideration of what is right for students, grounded in her confidence in her professional

abilities or expertise. This response reflects the role that context and climate plays in a teacher's

ability to realize their moral professional agency.

MTAC as a Democratic Space

Research question #2 asked: "How does teachers' participation in a democratic space

impact their sense of, and ability to enact, agency?" I knew prior to conducting this study that the

MTAC teachers were agentic individuals. What I was less clear about were the specific ways in

which they enacted their agency within their professional work. Additionally, I was curious to

know how teachers' involvement in a group founded on the principle of teacher voice, and

honoring their agency, impacted their agency development and future enactments. Overtime I

was able to witness the MTAC's agentic growth as a whole, but had fewer opportunities to

observe their individual enactments of agency. Unsurprisingly, the teachers' participation did not

necessarily impact their sense of individual professional agency. However, the teachers indicated

that their participation impacted both their notion of what was possible within their individual

contexts, as well as their sense of collective professional agency. Consider the next two quotes

by teachers describing how MTAC has functioned as a democratic space:

I think that MTAC made me more aware. Because I used to live in my own little (school

name) world. Then if it had something to do with my kids then it was important to me, but I wasn't really thinking of Richmond as a whole. It definitely has made me more aware about what happens in other people's schools. It helps me decipher the lies that I'm told. It also helped me to be more involved with the people above me. Knowing school board members, or talking. You know what I'm saying? At first, I was like ... I don't know, I just was very hands off. I was like, I'm going to try to change the world from right here, and whatever I can do in this little space that I have, Imma do it. I think it taught me to look at the bigger picture. It's helped me with that.

I think we were all pretty agentic individuals to begin with, and had our own voices that we were using, in whatever ways we use them. I think to come together and be able to see, oh, there are other people like me that think outside of the box. Or like, that's not cool. I'm not really with that idea. I think that was a good thing. I think that this is a group of people who truly do value teaching as a profession and are about the business of making education better, making things better for kids.

The teachers in the above two quotes describe how MTAC not only increased their awareness of both wider issues beyond their individual schools and how other teachers consider their professionalism, but also made them think more broadly about their professionalism as their awareness increased. The first teacher also shared how, prior to joining the MTAC, she was going to "try to change the world" from her classroom. While that undoubtedly remains an extremely valuable pursuit, possessing a wider scope with which to consider educational issues was an important experience for her.

The first quote also suggests that MTAC served as a learning space in which teachers could discuss issues within their schools, and according to the teacher, *"decipher the lies"* that

she was told. This brings up an interesting point about the value teachers found from MTAC offering them opportunities to be in space focused on their professionalism with their colleagues. She valued the time that she spent in conversation and action with her fellow MTAC teachers because it contextualized her own work. Teachers often spoke of the tendency to close their doors and teach, which is not an uncommon refrain for teachers, and while they admit that this still happens, they know that they have an outlet for times in which they need to productively process their work.

The same teacher also shared how participating in the MTAC increased her involvement with individuals in positions of power. This point came up as something that as a society, we often take for granted. Particularly in Richmond, which as a small city, projects an image of accessibility to elected officials and decision-makers, leading to the assumption that teachers are offered ample opportunities to share their concerns about their work. However, the teachers described how while opportunities may exist on paper, the logistics of their schedules often make it unrealistic for them to attend and participate. Additionally, they spoke about how the nature of those interactions is often deceiving and leads to nothing happening. Participating in the MTAC, however, provided them a platform which in turn helped them find their voice:

> *MTAC, I feel like it's been amazing. It has been eye opening. I do feel like I learned a lot of cultural things about RPS... I do feel like I've been empowered, I've figured out my own voice, I've gotten over the fear of speaking at a school board meeting. There's just little things. When you're sitting with the mayor of the city and you can tell him what you're feeling, I feel like I can do this with the school board members, I can do this with a principal.*

Not only did this teacher express how the MTAC served as an educational experience, but she

also shared how she felt empowered through her participation and experiences interacting with the mayor, and then took this sense of empowerment back to her school. Another teacher described how her participation in the MTAC increased her understanding of the power in collective agency. In the story below, she shared how she and her colleagues enacted their collective agency to push back on a proposed decision that would have negatively affected her students:

> *They were proposing to change preschool hours… to 9:30-4:30, which would make it as long as the high school day, and a little longer than middle school and elementary school… Like that doesn't make any sense so we were able to get together and all rally around this issue of nobody wanted to be there until 5pm. That's when the rats come out. (laughter)… It started with like we have a secret Facebook group of like staff. And it started with like, "Did y'all see this". And I listed the little clip of the screen shot of the PowerPoint that they proposed at the school board meeting, and people started commenting like no, no, no. And so, we… started whispering and getting up, and then were kind of like let's do it. So [we were] able to get together and we wrote a letter to the school board and (district personnel name) to the administration and we got a response of 5 out of 9 school board members within an hour. Which I've never gotten on anything.*

In the Introduction section of Chapter 1, I shared a quote by Robert Bruno to which I would like to return for a moment as a means of wrapping up this case report. When asked about the reason professionals eventually rise up, he responded with, "what really generates this explosion of resistance among professional workers is when they feel they're the last line of defense between the public they serve and others who would threaten the professionalism of their work" (Scheiber, 2018). Through this inquiry, this quote has resonated with me time and time again as

teachers have expressed new forms of resistance to use in defense of the public they serve, and a deepened commitment to participating in efforts to eliminate threats to their professional work. However, by the end of this study, I felt that the sensationalism of this quote could be avoided. Teachers expressed how by participating in the MTAC, they had a renewed sense of professionalism and saw potential for collective agency to elevate their voices in everyday conversations and decision-making processes related to their work and their students' needs.

Conceptual Antitheses

In the case report above, I focused primarily on discussing how teachers participating in the MTAC articulated their understanding of professionalism and agency. However, several other themes pertinent to this study emerged beyond those represented within the conceptual framework. In what follows, I share these themes using several conceptual antitheses. I present the themes as such, not to imply that teachers consider their work in terms of reductive binaries, but rather because contrasting themes were often a way that the teachers processed their perspectives throughout this study.

Agency: Outside and Within

This study was situated within a space that existed, for the most part, outside of teachers' immediate contexts, more specifically, in the primary social and political context described through the conceptual framework. During initial talks with school board members and city council members, as well as individuals within the mayor's office, it was emphasized that the MTAC should occupy a space outside of schools. These sentiments were influenced by widespread concern[15] about inappropriate mayoral influence on school governance. The MTAC

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[15] This included, to some extent, my own concern for inappropriate mayoral influence in school governance. One might then wonder why I would conceptualize and create a group that could be interpreted as an offering to the mayor of an additional access point to the schools. However, my rationale was focused, as described in Chapters 1 and 2, in the potential benefit for teachers, both

teachers quickly learned what was within the mayor's office's purview, or what was considered off-limits for the MTAC to address because the mayor lacked the political power and lane of governance to do anything about it. For example, during the beginning talks with the mayor's office, the teachers expressed an interest in forming partnerships between non-profit programs, or groups, focused on trauma-informed practices and some of the schools with teacher representation on the MTAC. However, it was made clear that any partnerships intended to take place in the schools could not be a focus of the MTAC, as those partnerships would need to be developed and approved by the school system. Equipped with this knowledge, the teachers found ways to successfully enact their agency outside of the schools in their role as MTAC members. The teachers' participation in formal MTAC meetings and meetings with the mayor's policy advisers, in addition to meetings that they scheduled with individual city councilors signaled their level of confidence in their role as MTAC members. When sitting in those meetings, they were bold, and asked targeted questions, but they were also strategic and intentional in an effort to establish public relationships with elected officials and others. They enacted their agency outside of schools, claiming their power as an advisory council in a public way.

The teachers also appeared to seamlessly implement lessons they learned from their outside work within their school buildings, and other areas in their immediate contexts. Organizing colleagues to pen a letter to the school board resulting in a reversed district-wide scheduling decision is no small feat, and the teacher responsible for this action attributed it to seeing effective agency enactment within the MTAC. Another teacher noted how she felt that her principal left her alone once she learned of her membership on the MTAC, empowering her to

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in terms of their direct access to elected officials who possessed influence within Richmond's political realm, and also in terms of providing them with space to enact their agency outside of schools, to expand their own influence in decision-making.

more freely speak up to advocate for her students during SOL scheduling and retesting[16]. Those are just two instances shared by teachers who, building upon experiences of successful agency enactment *outside* of the school took action *within* their immediate contexts, but they speak to the potential of democratic spaces as educative experiences. An educative experience grounded in participatory democratic theory, holds that individuals learn to participate through participating. The MTAC provided the experiences through which teachers learned these participatory skills. As such, democratic spaces also have the potential to impact how teachers go about reclaiming the contested nature of their professionalism in spaces both within and outside of their direct work.

Obstructions and Openings

Teachers in this study talked about the brokenness of the educational system in ways that indicated a perception that it creates both obstructions as well as opportunities for teachers to enact their agency. Santoro (2017) talks about moral violence occurring when teachers are not acknowledged as moral agents, or when a teacher makes a moral claim and it fails to be recognized as moral. Similarly, teachers in this study expressed how within their contexts, an increase in accountability measures seems to have been conducive to the downplaying of the importance of morals, particularly teachers' morals, in educational decision-making. Much of the scholarship on the importance of teachers' morality tends to position teachers themselves as moral exemplars and models (Hugh & Sockett, 1993), or as vehicles for moral education (Campbell, 2003), versus focusing on the central role that teachers' morals play in educational decision-making. Rather than acknowledging the importance of teachers enacting their individual agency to meet students' needs, the assumption, and therefore expectation, is that they

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[16] Thankfully, no teachers indicated any sense that their work was made more difficult or antagonistic due to their membership on the MTAC.

deliver material in a standardized way to ensure all students receive the material. In this sense, teachers' morals are viewed as factors to control. The teachers shared how principals and central administrators regularly monitor, in some cases down to the minute, what they are doing, and that this sense of control and surveillance creates a climate where they feel their moral agency enactment is obstructed.

On the other hand, while some teachers recognize the obstructions in the system, there are also teachers who find ways to use them to their advantage. Several of the teachers expressed how they view a hyper-focus on the minutiae of their work— returning to class from recess at exactly the moment indicated by their schedule, writing student learning objectives on the board, posting their credentials outside of their classroom door— as indications that openings for their agency enactment exist. These spaces might be akin to what Boyte and Finders (2016) refer to as shadow spaces They describe how their administrators' or supervisors' controlling behavior generally signals a distraction with checklists and evaluative forms requiring specific, observable, quantifiable data. Some teachers talked about the social justice content that they are able to embed in their content instruction because principals are too bogged down by checking that lesson plans are turned in and have the required sections and format that they do not have time to truly review content. This is not to say that teachers are trying to get one over on their administrators, but that somewhat counterintuitively, the climate of accountability provides space to enact their agency and teach moral content. In some general sense, obstruction breeds opportunity.

Teacher as Professional: Student-centered or Wider-society

This theme represents a perennial tension in teachers' work, and therefore a fundamental question with which teachers in this study wrestled. The notion of "teacher as professional" has

the potential to conjure various images and evoke competing sentiments. This came up in teachers' perceptions of how stakeholders possess differing ideas of what "teacher as professional" or "professionalism" entails. However, doing what is best for students was something that almost all of the teachers agreed could be a universal theme of professionalism. What might be different is how "doing what is best for students" is operationalized by various stakeholders: administrators might believe it means turning in lesson plans for every single lesson, including differentiation for every level of ability in the teachers' class, no matter how long it takes for the teacher to write them. Parents might believe that doing what is best for students means spending more time engaging in real-world experiences, generally unscripted and responding to students' needs on-the-spot. Teachers might believe it is some marrying of the two—having a plan for the learning that he or she intends to take place, but having the flexibility to switch things up on-the-spot in order for the lesson to be meaningful to students.

Teachers nearly unanimously expressed that a core tenet of their professionalism is that it is student-centered, grounded in moral values of what is best for their students. This presents an interesting tension with the notion of a professional as knowing and caring about the wider context of their work. Interestingly, the teachers in this study did not situate their influence within the wider scope of society, nor did they express concern with how their work impacts wider-society; they were almost singularly interested in how well they are able to meet their individual students' needs, and whether their context allowed them to do so. While their work as members of the MTAC encouraged them to think about their role in elevating teachers' voices as professionals, and provided them with a platform to speak about the importance of teachers' expertise as professionals knowing what is best for their students in a more macro sense, they did not express a prioritization of this aspect in the interviews.

This is of particular interest to me as a Foundations scholar. When teachers discussed their work, it tended to come from a place of primarily caring for their students, and the values associated with that component of their professionalism. Throughout this study, I sensed that the cause of this is two-fold. Not only do teachers truly care about their students, but they are also combatting unrelenting media and other public narratives that they aren't doing enough for their students. It makes sense that teachers, when faced with this onslaught of negative public opinion about their professional intentions and commitment, naturally respond with a laser-focus on their professionalism as it relates to their students' well-being and academic success.

However, this exclusive focus obscures a broader view of teacher as professional comprising more than a student-centered focus. Teachers' participation in wider-society, and passing on lessons to students about the importance of civic participation is also an important component of their professionalism. The teachers spoke about how much they gained from being a part of the MTAC, not only because of the sense of community it fostered, but also in the way that it reminded them of the importance of participating to impact wider-society. So, while they acknowledged the importance or democratic and civic participation, it almost never came through in their expressions of what it means to be a professional. There remained a disconnect between the student-centered and wider-society values of their professionalism.

Misalignment Versus Alignment

The theme of tension between teachers' perceptions of their professionalism, and others' expectations to which they are often held, emerged through teachers' stories. Although this tension exists extensively in the literature (Ball, 2003; Day & Smethem, 2009; Masuda, 2010; Stone-Johnson, 2014), the way in which teachers in this study spoke about tension in their work was more nuanced than previously described, and implied more of a moral misalignment than a

disconnect. Instead of descriptions of a specific missing element in other's views of professionalism, the teachers expressed a more philosophical misalignment between professional values. Teachers described their educational climate as one marred by checklists and other methods of accountability, in which the fundamental belief is that teachers demonstrate professionalism by externally presenting themselves as such-meaning their image matters- both attire and behavior came up repeatedly in interviews with the teachers. They talked about how their principals made it clear that wearing denim, or even denim-like material is unprofessional, and teachers working with young children were encouraged to wear high heels and a tie if they wanted to present an image of themselves as professionals. In addition to attire, teachers described how some individuals believe that professionals do not engage in any behavior or action that may reflect negatively on the image of the school system or school. The teachers viewed this as counterintuitive to both defending the profession and improving education within today's political climate. They spoke about how important it is for teachers to act in ways that challenge deficit notions about the students they teach, and more general harm done by standardizing education. On teacher described the connection she made between her professionalism and how she sees what has been happening to the quality of education her students are receiving. She described how:

> *This has been the year that I realized that kids have become robotic, and for me… I needed to make sure my professionalism…that they see that they are not robots because that's the way education is going, where we just want you to know questions to a test. Personally, that's something that I live out in my professional life. Just because my principal said that, that doesn't mean I'm going to do it. Not because I'm disrespecting you but I know best practice. Respect the practice not what is written on a paper. I think*

if you have your own voice they don't want to hear that. It's sad because I am a professional, at the end of the day. When you decided to come and be personal, and not professional, I had to go back and check you that I'm a professional at the end of the day. That's something that I believe in, that teachers have to understand, that you shouldn't be fearful that something's going to happen if you don't do this, or you don't do that

This teacher notes her observation that her students are becoming robotic, and that she felt that she needed to do something as a professional to address that. Saying, *"respect the practice, not what is written on paper"* demonstrates that she views the two at odds with each other, and that ultimately what should prevail is her professionalism, and doing what is right for the students, not what is written on paper and handed down from above.

The teachers who were a part of that same focus group responded to that scenario with a discussion of how they viewed certain requests as inappropriate to require of professionals. They conversed about how certain expectations of them prompted a misalignment between their professionalism and what others believed should be a part of their professional responsibilities. Several teachers on the group chat were messaging one evening about an email that had been sent to all preschool teachers with information indicating that enrollment numbers were down and inviting teachers to assist with recruitment of preschoolers. When this email was brought to the attention of the central office, they expressed shock that the email had been sent to the teachers instead of the internal list of individuals to whom the message was supposedly intended. The teachers were irate, stating that it was being used as a scare tactic- if teachers saw that enrollment numbers were down, they would make the connection that positions would be cut, prompting them to participate in recruitment. They also suspected this was a ploy to pit veteran preschool teachers against greener teachers who, due to seniority protocols with contract

renewals, may lose their jobs before more senior teachers. They were appalled that the email would be "sent" to them, but not surprised because their sense was that the central administration views teachers as expendable, in spite of the teacher shortage in the district. The teachers sensed a fundamental philosophical misalignment with the administration responsible for the email, and very vocally expressed themselves through email responses and social media posts. They received emails back explaining that they misunderstood the situation, and that the email was an absolute accident. The teachers discussed how from the tone of the emails, it seemed that their outward expressions of frustration were not appreciated because of the image it presented of the administration. The teachers concluded with the point that in moments where professional misalignments become clear, disparate notions of how teachers should go about enacting their moral agency are also made clear.

On the other hand, the teachers also described instances in which their professional values were in alignment with another individual, and how that alignment impacted their sense of agency enactment. One teacher shared how her principal is generally supportive of her decision to *"buck the system in slightly undermining ways."* She described a time in which she spoke to her principal about not attending a professional development that she, herself, was more qualified to deliver. Her principal understood, *"without having to agree, you know, because she gets how the game is played,"* and the teacher was permitted to stay in her classroom that day and accomplish work that she needed to get done. In that moment, the teacher appreciated the alignment of professional values that her principal demonstrated, and it signaled to her that the principal recognized and respected her expertise, in addition to her enactment of agency. Another teacher described the way her principal responds when she comes to him with issues:

In that situation, I'm like, you got to still speak truth to power. I can't tell you how many

times I've gone down to my boss, and I'm like…he sees me coming. He's like, "Can we

just go in the office?" I'm like, "Close the door." He's like, "Calm down, because there

are kids coming in. Can we just go in my office please?" I'm like, "My hair's on fire. I'm

like this is not right. Do you understand? Do you get that we have two kids who are

administratively placed? Do you understand?" I'm like, "Just the way I am right now.

No. This is ridiculous."…He goes, "What I hear you saying is …Here's what I'm going to

do. I'm going to contact Mom." What I will say is when I come to him like that, he doesn't

say, figure it out. I'm like ... He knows.

It's unfortunate that you have to do that...

It is unfortunate but he also knows that when I get to that point, and I'm like, my hair's on

fire and I'm coming to you and you see me coming down the hallway… You know that it

is serious.

When this teacher goes to her principal with an issue, he listens, and because they are in alignment on who the expert is in that situation, the teacher feels empowered to enact her agency and ultimately do what is right by her students. Alignment and misalignment are important considerations that teachers make when determining what degree of agency they will enact. Whether teachers' and other individuals' professional understandings are aligned or misaligned has impacts on moral agency, professional agency, and thus moral professional agency.

Lessons Learned

The constructions presented in the above case report are intended to present how teachers participating in a democratic space understand their professional work. Within constructivist research, lessons learned are used as a "sensemaking" strategy, allowing the researcher, and

reader, to transition from the case report to ideas that can be carried forward (Rodwell, 1998). In what follows, I present lessons intended to move us forward, in the hope that they are considered by both teachers in their professional lives, as well as individuals who have the ability to improve the professional lives of teachers. The lessons shared below reflect my interpretations of the MTAC teachers' experiences and perceptions of their professionalism. In Chapter 5, I use these lessons as a foundation upon which I discuss implications of this study's findings for future practice and research.

1. Teachers' perceptions of a broken educational system simultaneously create obstruction and offer opportunity for teachers to enact their agency within professional contexts.

2. Teachers' considerations of their work involve the confluence of morals, professionalism, and agency, with agency manifesting in various ways inside and outside of schools.

3. For teachers participating in democratic spaces, instances of alignment and misalignment offer them insight into others' perspectives of teachers' professional work, but do not necessarily inform teachers' own perspectives.

4. Teachers' participation in democratic spaces offers remoralizing experiences, oftentimes sustaining teachers in their work.

Conclusion

The findings of this study, as presented through the case report above, explain how teachers participating in a democratic space understand their professional work. Although most teachers described coming to this work from different lived experiences, they expressed how their work is now driven by a moral commitment to their profession and their identity as professionals. Hilferty (2008) describes professionalism as a social construct that is defined and redefined by ever-changing theory, policy, and practice. Through conversations over seven

months, the teachers and I were able to construct knowledge of what we considered teachers'

professionalism to entail within our specific temporal context. In the final chapter, I discuss

implications for this work in terms of research and practice, recognizing that ongoing efforts in

all three areas is necessary if we seek to more deeply understand the complex nature of teachers'

professionalism. I also discuss how this study fosters the creation of a certain idea of

professionalism, paving the way for us to move beyond mere understanding to reimagining how

we think about teaching and teachers' participation regarding their professional work.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion

Introduction

I began this research interested in how teachers make sense of their professionalism and agency when provided with an opportunity to participate in a democratic space. As a classroom teacher, I was not afforded many formal chances to engage in conversations with my colleagues about the philosophies and perspectives guiding our professional work. Perhaps those conversations would have been indicative of a climate and culture that would have sustained my time in the classroom. I entered this study with assumptions about teachers' experiences that informed their decision-making and actions, thinking that because I had been a teacher, I would know how teachers thought about their work. I thought that my doctoral studies would have provided me with a framework capable of accommodating and neatly organizing teachers' experiences. My thinking was greatly flawed in both respects. The process by which this study took shape, evolved, and culminated, was wholly informed by the MTAC teachers and our process of ongoing knowledge construction. The initial ideas with which I entered this inquiry proved to be extremely limited in terms of capturing teachers' understandings of their professional work, but were transformed and improved through conversations with the teachers. The knowledge constructed in conversation with teachers has expanded my thinking about their work to include promising opportunities in which they can reclaim the contested space of their professionalism and actually transform that space from within.

Taken together, the lessons listed at the end of Chapter 4, combined with the conceptual framework and case report presented earlier in the same chapter, provide a strong starting point for a more thorough discussion of both answers to this study's research questions as well as

theoretical and practical implications of this study's findings.

Revisiting the Conceptual Framework: Inclusion of Morals

Importance of Morals

The conceptual framework guiding this study primarily positioned professionalism as an overarching concept of agency theory. In other words, I assumed that teachers' possession and enactment of agency took shape through their professional development and identity. This assumption was limited in both scope and substance. The revised conceptual framework that emerged from the findings of this study, the Moral Professional Agency framework, illustrates the interconnectedness of teachers' professionalism, morals, and their agency. It was simplistic to assume that teachers' primary modes of agency possession and enactment would be filtered through their identity as a teacher, versus acknowledging the important moral development as a human first, and then negotiating *those* morals as they relate to the morals and understandings you develop as a professional. The isolated nature of my initial thinking about these two concepts-professionalism and agency- demonstrates how I had not fully processed my own experiences and identity as a professional. Through this study, and in particular, my conversations with teachers, I have begun to realize that my agency is not necessarily reliant on my professionalism, rather it existed prior to my development as a teacher and only as I gained experience, the interaction between the two became more refined. My moral professionalism, the two-concept interaction is what was lacking in the initial framing of this study. In addition, talking with the teachers reminded me of how prevalently professionalism is used as what Boyte and Finders (1995) describe as Kenneth Burke's (1966) concept of a terministic screen, or:

> [C]ommonsensical screens [that] shape educational policies without interrogation, preventing deeper conversations. If we look at the values and beliefs embedded within

them, a different version of reality emerges. These screens deflect attention away from broader societal issues that impact student learning. (p. 137).

The terministic screen of professionalism allows it to become imbued with values and beliefs about what teachers' work should entail without prompting any real investment in unpacking how various individuals perceive its meaning.

Some of the reading that I have done since beginning this study also informed its progression as well as my thinking about professionalism and the morals imbued in teachers' work. David Hansen's (1995) *The Call to Teach* is one of the most insightful accounts of teachers' work that I have come across, and reading it helped me consider teaching as more than a list of traits, and something more than a framework as I developed my ideas throughout the course of this study. His representation of teaching as a vocation, a calling, or more specifically a dual-embodiment of a social good and personal fulfillment helped me to consider teaching more broadly. The conceptual framework that developed out of this study responds to work that has come before it, and necessarily interacts with extant literature. In the section that follows, I discuss implications of the conceptual framework as it relates to scholarship on the various concepts at the heart of this study.

Interestingly enough, this study's initial conceptual framework did not include a component of morals through which to explore teachers' constructions of their professionalism. Although I noted some examples of morals discussed within the review of literature on professionalism in Chapter 2, examples of scholarship connecting morals to agency was disparate, and thus did not initially seem necessary to include in an inquiry about teachers' professionalism (Day, 2002; Hansen, 1995; Pels, 1999; Santoro, 2016; Shulman, 1998). I note this because it suggests a potentially important paradigmatic omission in the way we have been

studying and analyzing teachers' enactment of agency within their work.

While I have acknowledged the work of several scholars who consider morals as a grounding professional principle (Campbell, 2003, 2014; Santoro, 2016; Shulman, 1998; Sockett, 1993; Toom et al., 2015), I differentiate this study's findings from extant scholarship in that beyond positing both that morals are central to teachers' work, it also suggests that this moral center necessitates an agentic professional disposition. As discussed before, this study uniquely brings professionalism, morals, and agency into conversation because they are concepts that teachers used to explain how they understand their professional work and their actions as professionals. The fact that morals emerged as central to teachers' professional identities carries with it implications for future work on teachers' negotiation of their moral centers in light of various reforms and initiatives. Additionally, scholarship focused on teachers' professional experiences should explore ways in which their morals inform the experience itself, in addition to subsequent implementation or resistance.

Contribution of a Revised Conceptual Framework

As morals and ethics inherent in teachers' work did not figure prominently in this study's initial framework, I have drawn connections between relevant existing scholarship and new perspectives gained through this inquiry. To begin, several scholars have explored the relationship between teachers' morals and their professionalism (Campbell, 2003; Hansen, 1995; Santoro, 2018; Sockett, 1983), and the body of work is worthy of review as it either demonstrates the limitations of existing literature, or complements this study's findings.

In the foreword to Campbell's (2003) *The Ethical Teacher,* Hargreaves and Goodson applaud Campbell in her insistence that "when the system or the school remains stubbornly unethical, individual teachers must dredge up the courage to stand up for what is ethically right,

even though they may suffer personally or professionally because of it" (p. xi). I argue that instead of placing this demand upon teachers, we have a responsibility to create spaces where teachers are not subject to personal or professional suffering. Although, as described earlier, if teachers had a strong enough personal sense of conviction, or if their confidence in the professional morals of their actions was great enough, they would accept the repercussions of their actions, they also acknowledged the intimidating and consequential climate in which they work. They expressed sympathetic reasons as to why teachers may not act, never faulting their colleagues who remain fearful of speaking out or acting, regardless of how morally in-the-right they may be.

Teachers even attempted to make sense of why they were better positioned to enact their agency, in one instance suggesting that perhaps because of their membership on the MTAC, and therefore, their proximity to, and involvement in, conversations with individuals in decision-making positions, they were not targeted like some of their other colleagues. This suggests implications for practice in terms of ways for teachers to reciprocate accountability, or counter the fear-tactics often employed in school systems and individual schools[19]. There need to be spaces, and opportunities for teachers to act on their professionalism without fear of retaliation. These spaces and opportunities are not likely to emerge unless we can shift the narrative to one that honors the voices of teachers and their professionalism versus viewing them as problems to be managed or controlled.

Campbell (2003) explores several concepts fundamentally comparable to concepts teachers discussed in this study including professional ethics which she defines as a term

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[19] This is not meant to sound naïve about how connections and relationships work among individuals in power. However, based on several teachers' anecdotes, their membership on the MTAC resulted in notably different treatment by supervisors and administrators.

"conceived of broadly as elements of human virtue, in all its complexity, as expressed through nuances of attitudes, intentions, words, and actions of the professional teacher" (p. 9). However, this study offers a slight reinterpretation of the existing paradigms currently employed to understand concepts such as professional ethics within teachers' work. To begin, I provide widely-recognized definitions and frameworks currently used to think about concepts related to teachers' morals and professionalism.

Moral agency exists as a widely-recognized concept within the literature, and therefore it was important for this study to consider the applicability of extant understandings to its teachers' contexts. Campbell (2003) describes moral agency as a:

> double-pronged state that entails a dual commitment on the part of the teacher. The first relates to the exacting ethical standards the teacher as a moral person and a moral professional holds himself or herself to, and the second concerns the teacher as a moral educator, model, and exemplar whose aim is to guide students towards a moral life. (p. 2).

While beyond the scope of this study to contextualize my findings within the second prong of Campbell's (2003) scholarship related to moral education, this study's findings share commonalities to her first prong. Campbell acknowledges two concepts: morals and agency, and even acknowledges the distinction between being a moral person and a moral professional. However, her organizing structure lacks attention to moments of overlap between the personal and professional that the teachers in this study described at-length. There were times throughout the interviews that teachers described their professional morals as their personal morals and vice versa, indicating times when even the teachers are not clear which is informing the situation.

This study's findings suggest the usefulness of bringing currently isolated concepts of

moral professionalism, moral agency, and professional agency into conversation with one another. Considering the current educational landscape, it is no longer realistic[20] to consider teachers' work as neutral or morally uncharged, and no longer realistic to consider teachers to be passive, and value-neutral individuals within classrooms. While acknowledging the usefulness, and realistic prevalence, of two-concept interactions within many teachers' work, findings from this study suggest the potential for teachers to embrace their moral professional agency in order to reclaim the contested space of their professionalism. The findings from this study suggest that teachers gain something by associating their morals and agency with their professionalism.

Study Limitations

The main limitation of this study was the issue of time, which negatively impacted this study in a few important ways. Unfortunately, the timing of this study was such that the bulk of data collection and analysis fell in the Spring, which happens to be an extremely buy time for teachers. The ideal design in which the MTAC teachers would serve as co-researchers was nixed almost immediately, during the initial presentation of the project to the MTAC teachers. Anticipating the busiest season of their year, we had to scale back their involvement in the data analysis of this study. Therefore, I generated preliminary themes and presented them to teachers participating in the focus group interviews.

Time also impacted the number of teachers who could participate toward the end of the data collection. The first two rounds of focus group interviews yielded participation from 16 and 15 teachers respectively, but the final round of interviews only yielded 6 teacher participants. Similarly, the first debrief session involved 16 teachers while the second debrief session only

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[20] Some may argue that it has never been appropriate to consider the classroom as a value-neutral space. Indeed, it is beyond the scope of this project to address this controversial issue. However, in light of a conversation on morals, I express that my position on this topic is that our current political context necessitates the classroom be considered a space to address social issues.

involved 12 teachers. The element of time was beyond our control, and I attempted to compensate for this by adding additional writing prompts, but time still kept teachers from participating to the full extent.

In order to address this limitation in future studies, it would be beneficial to consider working with a group that has been established for enough time to have built trust and an effective communication system so that follow up emails and other check-ins would not feel intrusive or overly burdensome. Additionally, it would be beneficial to full participation if the data collection took place during the Fall, right after school has begun, or over the Winter, outside of any major holidays when teachers might be traveling. I would say that because this study took place over seven months, there was enough time built in to allow for multiple focus group sessions in each round, and also enough time in between each data collection that I had time to initially analyze the transcripts for knowledge constructions. However, I did feel a bit of a time crunch at the end of the process during the creation of the case report. I would recommend allowing more time than I allotted in this project, to fully and thoroughly analyze the data and write the case report.

My closeness to the MTAC as a group, and therefore my relationships with the MTAC teachers as individuals, were related limitations that I perceived throughout this study. They might, in some ways, be viewed as opportunities, but as they inspired ongoing reflexive journal entries, I consider it important to discuss them as limitations here. I imagined the MTAC to be a group that would empower teachers as professionals, and thus designed the group as such. Throughout the seven months of this study, in addition to the time prior and since, I have established, developed, and maintained relationships with the MTAC members, checking in on them individually when I knew things were going on in their personal and their professional

lives, and as a group when big events or issues were impending. Because of this sense of "ownership" I had over the well-being of the teachers as humans in addition to the "ownership" I felt over the group as an extension of my action to elevate teachers as professionals, I was protective in instances when I sensed that intervening would make their lives easier. I also stepped in during times when I felt individuals were less than responsive to the group's needs. This may have presented the image that I was leading the group, even though I did all that I felt I could to distribute leadership and allow the group to determine what it acted on, and how. My involvement with the group may have impacted the responses that the teachers gave when it came to discussing how MTAC impacted their sense of professionalism and agency. They may have felt that I needed to hear certain things. However, I feel that my honesty with them prior to the study beginning, as well as during the study with issues not directly pertaining to the inquiry process, fostered a sense of safety and encouraged their honesty in return. In terms of changing how I handled situations or my own researcher disposition in order to affect the degree to which this closeness served as a limitation, I do not know that I would have conducted myself any differently. I believe that my closeness enabled truthful responses and candid behavior from the teachers in this study.

Another limitation worth studying has to do with my positionality insofar as my assumptions and lenses I brought to bear on this project informed both the study's design, including the emergent nature of the study's design, the scope and focus of the project, and the methodological decisions I made throughout the project. For example, most of the findings in Chapter 4 are more related to teacher professionalism than democratic spaces. This may have something to do with how as a graduate student I have developed frames regarding the current state of public education that focused my attention on specific aspects of this project over others.

Focusing on issues of teachers' agency and professionalism potentially narrowed the discussions in ways that did not allow for related themes to emerge. For example, in my initial recruitment of the MTAC teachers, I was extremely attentive to issues of race and diversity, but throughout the focus group interviews, the issue of race did not explicitly surface. Reflecting on this, I acknowledge the missed opportunity that this suggests, particularly as Richmond could be described as a racially divided city, and RPS a racially divided school system. Another way to think about why issues of professionalism emerged as the dominant findings of this study is to consider the tension between deductive and inductive research processes. While it may have been generative to introduce a conversation framed by the issue of race, I intentionally decided to frame conversations in response to what emerged from the teachers' experiences and stories themselves. While the absence of conversations related to race is likely a result of the emphasis I placed on issues of agency and professionalism over other factors impacting teachers' experiences, it may also be related to a limitation of this study's scope, and suggest areas for future empirical investigation.

Implications for Research and Practice

Considering the theory and ideas generated from this study, I discuss its implications for future research and practice. Many of these implications are drawn from what I would like to see happen in the future as it relates to teachers' work, particularly through the creation of increased opportunities for teachers to influence their own work.

Directions for Future Research

This project not only whet my appetite for additional research involving teachers' stories and experiences, but it also increased my interest in understanding the perceptions and understandings of individuals who work with teachers to impact change, or make decisions that

impact teachers' work. For example, future research that might evolve out of this study may focus on inquiries based on interviews with state level officials, mayors, and superintendents who form teacher advisory councils, or other comparable groups, in order to explore how they understand teachers' involvement in such groups, and teachers' professionalism. These opportunities may serve as educative experiences that we could use to improve the practices employed in these groups. It would be useful to determine whether perceptions and experiences in other regions are similar to Richmond in order to gain a broader understanding and address perceptions of professionalism on a larger scale.

The findings of this study suggest the need for additional research that moves beyond understanding teachers toward explicitly transforming their understandings and practices. One of the big ideas that emerged from this project is the notion that we broaden our conception of "teacher as professional." Current understandings include teachers as pedagogical and content experts, but findings from this project indicate the need to explore ideas of teachers as *context* experts, and implications that may result from this. For example, if we acknowledge the valuable understandings that teachers have of their communities, classrooms, and students, we may conclude that teachers' specific knowledge is important for policy considerations. The belief that teachers are experts of their contexts necessitates that we consider their knowledge when making decisions at various levels. It also suggests that we consider teachers as conduits of information and insight. On the other hand, we need to think carefully about this notion of teachers as context experts as it also presents potential challenges. Consider a teacher who claims to know everything about a child's context, but who, in reality has limited understandings of the students' home culture. Imagine an individual entering the classroom who has a great deal of knowledge about this students' culture and a teacher dismissing this insight purely on the basis that the

individual has not spent much time in the classroom. In this instance, who is the context expert,

and how might we proceed to ensure that both sets of expertise are validated? Future work,

whether it takes the shape of participatory action research, or other forms of inquiry, is necessary

if we are to not only empower teachers as professionals, but to also encourage the most

appropriate action. This focus would also potentially help shift the paradigm of research *about*

teachers to one that embraces research *with* teachers. Future research should contribute to the

academic knowledge base regarding professionalism, as well as to promote discussion and

inform action within communities of practitioners.

Implications for Practice

To begin this section on future implications of this study, I must admit that this project

did little to reduce my anxiety about how teachers' work will continue to be impacted by reforms

and mandates that fail to take into consideration their contexts and students' needs. I still feel

overwhelmed by the mounting pressures on teachers' work and the way they are asked to do

more with less every single day. The teachers I spoke with also recognized the daunting nature of

the situation, and did not necessarily see a light at the end of the tunnel. I am increasingly

concerned with the programmatic responses to the teacher shortage in this country and the

potential further damage to the image of what it means to be a teacher.

However, the MTAC teachers, while expressing frustration with the current educational

landscape, also projected an incredible sense of efficacy that gives me hope for future studies of

this nature. Not only did the teachers confirm their change-agent dispositions time and time

again throughout this project, but they also demonstrated a deep understanding of the structures

responsible for the creation of current dysfunctional conditions. This suggests a great

opportunity, but also important responsibility, if we are committed to improving teaching

conditions, and thus students' learning experiences. Teachers shared various stories about their

teaching preparation programs, professional development, and day-to-day professional

interactions, indicating numerous opportunities for better preparing teachers, repairing

relationships and building trust, as well addressing systemic dysfunction across all levels.

Schools of Education.

As the primary context of teacher preparation, schools of education have great

responsibility for equipping teachers with the tools they need to be successful in the classroom.

At the same time that requirements for teacher licensure are being rolled back, preservice

teachers are still expected to enter the classroom prepared to teach an increasingly diverse

student body. And while:

> [t]eachers are urged to develop more knowledge of the subject matter they teach, better
>
> pedagogical content knowledge of how to get their material across, and deeper
>
> knowledge of how children learn…almost no attention is paid to the ethical or moral
>
> knowledge that teachers need to inform their professional judgements and guide their
>
> relations with children, colleagues, and others. (Campbell, xi).

The relaxing of preservice coursework requirements, including fewer courses geared toward

moral explorations of the profession, such as Foundations courses (Stemhagen, 2005), is

problematic if this study's findings are accurate. The teachers in this study indicated that their

moral considerations drive everything they do inside, and in some cases outside, the classroom.

Every teacher expressed that they make decisions based on what is going to be best for their

students. But what does that mean in an educational environment that is increasingly diverse,

making it more difficult for teachers to meet every student's needs? Additionally, how can a

teacher stay true to his or her morals when speaking up is viewed as insubordinate? Last, how

can teachers maintain a healthy mental and emotional state when their morals are constantly challenged in their work? For all of these reasons, in addition to others, it is increasingly important for schools of education to invest in courses and opportunities for preservice teachers to explore their morals and values, and to understand what to do when they are called into question or do not align with others'.

Further, schools of education must establish a healthy relationship with teacher agency, and even teacher activism, rather than submitting to the narrative that teaching is a neutral act. This study corroborates the argument for teacher preparation programs to focus on issues of morality (Ayers, 2004). If teachers' professionalism, morals, and agency are intertwined as this study's findings suggest, it is increasingly important for schools of education to find a way to present them as such, and help preservice teachers understand how to negotiate them in times of tension.

School Sites.

This study's findings have practical implications related to potential opportunities for teachers to reclaim the contested space of their professionalism. This is not to say that simply providing teachers with these opportunities will fix all of the issues described in this study, and others not discussed. However, the intentional act of opening up space, and inviting teachers in, is a necessary first step.

Perhaps it is unwise to prescribe any singular recommendation for all schools, however, based on the findings of this study, opening lines of communication and implementing processes and practices such as restorative justice within schools may heal some of the damage done by

policies that unintentionally[21] divide administrators and teachers. What that healing, and trust-

building looks like in various schools will likely be different, but based on the stories that

teachers told, and trends that we see across the nation within education, and in society more

broadly, addressing broken relationships is an effort worth making. Additionally, school

administrators should research and implement democratic processes within school buildings to

both build community, and gain buy-in from faculty, staff, parents, students, and community

members. Teachers expressed that opportunities to take on distributed leadership opportunities

empowered them and reaffirmed their professionalism. Teachers also spoke about how their

sense of professionalism increased when they were able to participate in conversations about

their work. Another implication for practice has to do with professional development. Teachers

expressed frustration with the lack of meaningful professional development opportunities that

they are offered throughout their careers. Growing professionally-both in content and pedagogy,

was something that teachers indicated was important to their understanding of professionalism,

but they lamented at the professional *under*development they receive. Providing teachers with

opportunities to decide what professional development they need, and adding professional

development that would deepen their understanding of federal and state-wide policies that are

impacting their work would increase their sense of professionalism. Providing teachers with

information that would allow them to advocate for both their profession and their students would

go a long way toward empowering them to enact their moral professional agency. Last, school

leaders should consider the ways in which mandates and initiatives are introduced to teachers.

Because teachers' professionalism is deeply embedded within a student-centered morality,

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[21] I acknowledge that some policies, arguably, cause intentional divides between individuals at various levels within a school building (i.e. principals and teachers). However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore this topic at-length.

anything that requires teacher participation will naturally be filtered through their lens of whether it will benefit students or not. Any initiative or program can look beneficial on paper, but teachers often spoke about how their students within their context needed something different. Therefore, including teachers in decision-making about which programs and resources their students need may increase both teacher buy-in, and student achievement.

Creation of Democratic Spaces.

Upon reflection, one of the most important aspects of the MTAC was purely functional: the space was designed to provide teachers with access to power, but it did so in a way that removed much of the potential risk from the equation. If I am being honest, this was not done intentionally; I had been solely focused on filling a void at the levels of political decision-making lacking teacher input, and not even really considered how ideally this situation positioned teachers to speak up without fear for their jobs. However, based on my experience, even if a teacher is agentic, the greater the risk of repercussions, the less likely the teacher will be to enact their agency, and so I should have known that by institutionalizing the MTAC within the mayor's office, and in turn mostly insulating them from danger, I was increasing the likelihood for them to enact agency.

This has several important implications for the creation of democratic spaces such as the MTAC at various levels of educational influence. First, while the MTAC represents a unique context where teachers' degree of advisory influence may be different from others, it still represents the important role of teachers' perspectives on educational decision-making. So, to begin, the findings from this study suggest the importance of these spaces to inform effective and responsible decision-making, and policy creation at various levels. Individuals seeking to create other democratic spaces should consider the recommendations that follow.

First, to the degree possible, the council members should be selected by someone, or some other group outside of the person who will be working with the teachers. This improves the likelihood that individuals will be selected based on the perspectives they bring to the table versus selection being based in nepotism, or some form of favoritism. Selections should be made to ensure the greatest diversity within the group in terms of demographics, preparation, and experience in order to promote a variety of ideas.

Second, the space should be teacher-led and facilitated as much as possible. Although teachers are likely overwhelmed by other professional responsibilities, it is of utmost importance that the group be teacher-led meaning agendas should be informed, if not created by teachers, and the discussions should be facilitated by teachers. For each meeting with the mayor, the teachers created an agenda based on items they wished to discuss, and sent it to the mayor's office two weeks prior to the meeting so that the mayor and his team would be prepared with relevant information to share. Each meeting was facilitated by two or three teachers, depending on the topics covered in, and a timekeeper was selected as well. This ensured not only that the teachers felt in control of the meeting, but also established a unique space in which they directed the flow of the dialogue. The teachers regularly commented that this was the first time they have presided over a meeting with an elected official, or someone with institutional power, and that it set a unique and empowering tone. Teachers in advisory council scenarios are regularly used to deliver messages back to their colleagues, which fails to accomplish the advisory purpose, and thus establishing an arraignment where teachers determine what is discussed as well as the way in which it gets discussed is an important aspect of the space.

Third, the group should have access to institutionalized power, but should also be positioned to minimize proximity to negative repercussions. The MTAC teachers expressed

feeling comfortable and confident making statements to the mayor because of two things: they were the experts in the room, and he could not fire them. This is an important component of an effective democratic space. People may not participate the greatest extent possible if they are fearful, or lack faith in the process. It is important to consider these factors in the creation of future democratic spaces. The uniqueness of this group is not lost on me, but I also see potential in groups like this to exist at various levels of decision-making. As context-experts, teachers' voices should be informing educational decisions and policy.

Elected Officials and School Leaders.

Based on the findings of this study, individuals elected to an office, or occupying an office, responsible for making decisions that impact teachers' work should recognize the importance of authentically creating space for democratic conversations and processes that inform those decisions. Not only would this increase teacher buy-in for ultimate decisions, but it would also increase the appropriateness of initiatives for various contexts, and therefore the effectiveness, of those decisions. Additionally, the existence of democratic spaces increases opportunities for teachers to engage in remoralizing experiences, which will be discussed in the next section.

Additionally, teachers described how their professionalism is student-centered. Unfortunately, one teacher described how on his annual evaluation, in the area of professionalism, he lost points for the first time in 16 years because he did not turn in lesson plans. This teacher defended his actions based on the rationale that he has excelled in planning and student achievement for 16 years, and that the new requirement for him to turn in his lesson plans detracted from his time to actually plan for student learning. This teacher's enactment of his moral professional agency exemplifies a decision made without consideration of teachers'

professionalism on the whole. I am not suggesting that lesson planning has no place, but rather than blanket enforcement of this type of mandate is viewed as an insult to teachers' professionalism. The practical implication therefore, is that decisions made across the board remain student-centered by attending to respect for teachers' expertise and professionalism.

The last point I would like to make regarding implications and next steps for elected officials and school leaders could also be considered a suggestion for us all as we move forward from this inquiry. I was a teacher for ten years, and continue to work with teachers on a daily basis, and yet I lacked a strong concept of this group's potential. Sure, I was initially optimistic and bold in forwarding the idea for the council itself, and as it progressed, the teachers and I continued boldly defending its worth, but the phrase "building the plane as we fly it" might be appropriate. I say all that to suggest that as educators and individuals invested in improving teaching and learning experiences, we proceed with patient urgency. Seemingly an oxymoron, this term, to me means that while we certainly acknowledge that time is of the essence if we hope to positively impact the lives of our students and the communities in which they live, we also must practice patience. For those of us committed to taking chances on new approaches, rebuilding trust, or establishing relationships, it would serve us well to be patient with others and ourselves as it pertains to making mistakes and learning from them. For this process, it meant working with a mayor who was learning about the potential of this group, just as I was. For future work, it may involve building unprecedented partnerships or coalitions to organize for, and reclaim, some power in the educational debate. In these and other yet-to-be-imagined scenarios, however, it will be necessary to exercise cautious optimism and to be hopeful about the potential for positive change. I do not mean to imply that we blindly trust the process if all signs point to deceit, or to continue on if individuals continue to demonstrate an unwillingness to

change or compromise. However, we must all be committed to investing in our students and our educational system, and in order to do that, we must also remain committed to the teaching profession. The teachers in this study remain hopeful and committed to this endeavor, as do I.

MTAC: A Model for Remoralizing Spaces

When I first researched literature to support my ideas for this study, the concepts on which I focused remained largely isolated from each other. Because of this, I never thoroughly considered morality as it factors into the various concepts, particularly professionalism and agency, at the heart of this study; for the most part, teachers' morals remained obscured in the conceptual framework. However, based on personal experiences and my assumptions about teachers' issues with their professional work, morals should have been figured as a prominent concept within this study. Luckily, the research process guiding this inquiry allowed for teachers to engage with the disparate concepts in an iterative fashion, revealing their connectedness, and allowing morals to emerge as central to the teachers' conceptualization of their professionalism. Also, fortunate for me, Doris Santoro's (2018) *Demoralized* provides a thoughtful consideration of factors leading to teachers' demoralization in their work— which became extremely important as the teachers and I processed our experiences—as well as ways in which teachers can become remoralized.

Santoro's work very heavily informed the conversations in which the MTAC teachers and I engaged, helping us move toward a deeper understanding of not only our past experiences, but also our actions on MTAC. The way that she brings teachers' voices to the forefront of her research, as well as her argument to shift the narrative away from one suggesting burnout toward one that accurately depicts teachers' demoralization, was formative for this study's emergent design and interpretation of findings.

Santoro (2018) writes that "demoralization occurs when teachers can no longer engage in what they consider good work" (p. 174). I would take this idea one step further to suggest that demoralization also occurs when teacher lack opportunities to engage in conversations about what good work entails. In many cases, the teachers in this study were demoralized. Most, if not all, of the MTAC teachers had reached a point of frustration and recognized a need to both harness it, and redirect it as positive action. What emerged as a theme outside of this study's research questions was the idea that MTAC served as a remoralizing space for the MTAC teachers.

For the purposes of this inquiry, I had defined a democratic space as: a site, or collective, focused on engagement in discourse and action with others with shared interests to improve living and working experiences and conditions. The notion of a democratic space is reminiscent of Boyte and Finders' (2016) shadow spaces, which the authors define as: "spaces that stand apart from the glare of mainstream policy, spaces where educators have room to 'experiment, imitate, learn, communicate, and reflect on their actions'" (p. 141). The MTAC was less shadow-y than Boyte and Finders (2016) may prefer, but the element of it being institutionalized seemed to be important to the teachers. They wanted their voices to be heard, both in conversation with their colleagues and allies, in addition to those they perceived to be in opposition to their ability to enact their moral professional agency. Perhaps this is because we are in a political moment when the stakes are so much greater. Teachers are constantly responding to the world around them, and doing their best to ensure that their students are safe and cared for within their classrooms, but they recognized that unless they move outside of the shadows, sharing their perspectives of professionalism and what it means to do good work with others, their ideas will never get to inform the wider educational discourse.

Built into the structure of the group, in addition to the design elements of the study, was opportunity to the teachers to engage with their colleagues and the mayor's office, on an ongoing basis, grounded in conversations to increase their understanding of teachers' professional work. MTAC as a group embraced the Deweyan notion that ongoing deliberation is a necessary mechanism to enact change. Prior to beginning this study, one of my committee members suggested that this inquiry had the feel of an intervention, or an effort to disrupt and evolve the process by which teachers learn to participate. I would say that in the end, this study did in fact serve as a sort of intervention on two fronts. Not only did it exemplify an educative experience, with teachers learning to participate by participating themselves, but this study also intervened as a remoralizing experience, with the MTAC serving as a remoralizing space.

The teachers expressed the sentiment that participating in this study was an educative experience, as they had opportunities to learn from their colleagues, both in the sense that it broadened their scope of professionalism, and it allowed them to process issues that came up in their work. Several teachers sent me text messages and emails following the focus group interviews expressing that as an opportunity to engage with ideas about what it means to be a professional, on both macro and micro levels, this study was valuable to them. I received the following message from one of the teachers after her first focus group interview: *Thank you so much for bringing us all together to talk about this stuff. I cannot believe that I have gone years without talking about any of this. My work! It's my work, and I don't talk about it. So, thank you. (heart emoji).* This text message was lovely to receive but indicated to me how true it is that teachers rarely have opportunities to engage in these conversations. Several scholars acknowledge this reality. As Santoro (2018) writes:

Nearly all the teachers I have met explained that they have had few opportunities to

articulate their understanding of good work. Those who did often used their individual
voice, through blogging or letters to the editor, to speak to a wider audience. Few of these
teachers, absent those who had engaged in activist activities, had articulated their vision
of good work in conversation with other teachers. Nearly all the teachers remarked that
they have no structured opportunities to reflect on how school policies and practices
affect their ability to enact good work.

This study not only created a structured opportunity for teachers to engage in reflective
conversations, but it also allowed them to do so in an empowering space, one that valued their
voices as central to a conversation about their professionalism.

Santoro (2018) rightly posits that "when teachers work together to alter the situations that
need to be changed, they begin to reverse the process of demoralization and build professional
community" (p. 185). Through this process, I witnessed teachers working together and building
community, with a common goal of altering their professional situations. This might not have
been intentional, but it was every bit as effective as if it had been planned from the beginning.
For almost all of the MTAC teachers, this was their first experience with any sort of professional
action outside of their classrooms. However, the teachers all applied for membership on the
council, perhaps subconsciously in some cases, recognizing the "need to readjust their practice to
be able to tap into the renewable resources available in good work" (Santoro, 2018, p. 177). By
doing so, the teachers took their professionalism into their own hands, and helped to shape the
MTAC into something more than a group or council; they shaped it into a remoralizing space.
The MTAC includes opportunities for all of Santoro's (2018) five overlapping remoralization
strategies- student-centered action, teacher leadership, activism, voice, and professional
community. As such, the MTAC has the potential to serve as a model for how to engage teachers

in opportunities that will not only sustain them as professionals, but will also build-up the teaching profession itself.

Conclusion

Designing and conducting this study with the MTAC teachers has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. To some, this statement may seem hyperbolic, but for me, as a scholar whose research and community work is almost entirely grounded in teachers' professional experiences, this study has been life-changing. A major reason that I entered this PhD program was to explore my own lived-experience as a teacher struggling to negotiate my professional morals with what I perceived to be others' expectations of me as a professional. In this study, I sought to construct knowledge with teachers of their understandings of professionalism as a means of providing us all a space to learn from each other and grow as professionals invested in our professionalism.

During the seven months of this study, and even before that, the MTAC teachers showed up in ways that challenged the common refrain that I had come to embrace: teachers lack the time, interest, or any other combination of reasons leading them to not participate. Not only did the teachers show up to meetings with the mayor, and interviews for this study, but they also showed up to town hall meetings around the city about various topics related to schools, city council meetings to support an increase in the school funding budget, press conferences to celebrate teacher appreciation week, and so many other events that asked more of them after already busy school days. During a focus group interview session, one teacher was talking about how someone told him he would be a good teacher, which launched us into a conversation about what it means to be a "good teacher." One of the teachers responded that a "good teacher" has what she calls: "*hustle spirit, that professional hustle*." She went on to explain that having

professional hustle means you don't have to be handed everything, but you will do what you have to do to in order to get the work done and make a difference. I believe this to be true, as I witnessed teachers taking action outside of their classrooms in effort to make a difference. I am proud to have worked with teachers who have a serious hustle spirit in everything that they do, including, but certainly not limited to, participating.

Not knowing where this line of thought would take us, I think the MTAC teachers and I would all agree that we have emerged changed as a result of engaging with the ideas of this study. I think we would also all agree that this process helped us make sense of our experiences in a way that will continue to empower us as we move into the future. The findings that emerged from this constructivist inquiry changed me as a scholar and as a teacher. Alan Ryan (1995), Dewey's biographer, stated Dewey's belief that a person "makes sense of the world for the sake of acting *on* the world," (p. 127). As such, the teachers in this study have provided me with some semblance of order in which I can continue to not only *think* about the challenging work that is teaching, but also to engage in scholarship and community work to effect change, thus acting on the world. My time talking with the MTAC teachers has reaffirmed for me the power in community, and the potential for intentionally opening up spaces for teachers to participate. It is my hope that the findings from this study will influence the creation of more opportunities for teachers to engage with ideas, and impact decision-making processes, related to their work.

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APPENDIX A- Consent Form

TITLE: Teachers' Constructions of Professionalism Within a Democratic Space

This consent form outlines important information about a research study in which you are being asked to participate. It will be discussed with you in detail by the researcher at which time you will be free to ask any questions regarding both the language of the form, as well as your participation in the study. You may take home a copy of this form to think about, or discuss with family or friends before making your decision.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of this research study is to understand teachers' constructions of professionalism as they participate in a democratic space, specifically, Richmond's Mayor's Teacher Advisory Council. The study is part of a dissertation research project in Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Education. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a member of the Mayor's Teacher Advisory Council and a public-school teacher over the age of 18.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AND YOUR INVOLVEMENT
This research seeks to understand various ways teachers in the Mayor's Teacher Advisory Council understand their professionalism and their sense of agency. For this project, you will be one of six to seventeen people who participate in debrief sessions and are being interviewed in a focus group setting.

In this study, you will be asked to participate in two debrief sessions, as well as three focus group interviews concerning your constructions of professionalism based in your experiences as a public- school teacher. The debrief sessions will be audio recorded and transcribed and should last between 30 and 45 minutes. The focus group interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed as well. The interviews should last between 60 and 90 minutes. You will be invited to participate in the ongoing analysis of the study's preliminary findings from the debrief sessions and focus group interviews. Before the completion of the project, you will have an opportunity to review the findings of the debrief sessions and interviews to ensure that meanings developed from the research process accurately reflect the knowledge constructed throughout the research project. All interviews and meetings will be conducted at a time and in a place most convenient to the group.

RISKS, BENEFITS AND COSTS
It is unlikely that participation in this study will cause you any risk or discomfort. However, sometimes talking about teaching experiences causes people to become upset. You do not have to talk about any subjects you do not want to talk about, and you may leave the project at any time.

You may not get any direct benefit from this study, but the information we learn from this study may help us think about teaching as a profession and the topic of teacher professionalism in new ways.

There are no costs for participating in this study other than the time you will spend in the debrief

sessions and focus group interviews.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Potentially identifiable information about you will consist of this consent form, audio files of interviews, transcripts of interviews, researcher field notes, and various journal entries. A fake name will replace your name in documented field notes and will not be connected to names on the consent form. All electronic data will be kept in password protected computer files. Hard copies of data will be kept in locked filing cabinets. Transcripts of interviews will be kept for a minimum of five years after the completion of the study. All other data containing identifiable information on computer files and hard copies will be destroyed upon completion of the research study.

Findings from this study may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but your name will not ever be used in these presentations or papers. It should be noted that, because of the importance of the local context to the study, the name of the council, the city, and the school district will be used in the presentations of data.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may stop at any time without penalty. You may also choose not to answer particular questions that are asked in the study.

Your participation in this study may be stopped at any time by the investigator without your consent. The reasons might include:
• You are unable to meet the required steps within the process.
• You are unable to attend follow up meetings, sessions, and interviews.
If you leave the study, you will be given the option of having any data already collected about you destroyed and not used in the project.

QUESTIONS
In the future, you may have questions about your participation in this study. If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, contact:

Student Investigator
Brionna Nomi School of Education
Virginia Commonwealth University
804-512-3223
nomibc@vcu.edu
Or
Faculty Instructor
Kurt Stemhagen, PhD
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Approved by the VCU IRB on 3/12/2019

APPENDIX B- Focus Group Interview Protocols

Round 1
Groups 1, 2 and 3

1. Why do you teach?

2. What are your beliefs about teaching?

3. What does it mean to be a professional?

    a. What experiences have most influenced your definition of a professional?

    b. In what ways do you identify as a professional?

4. What is your definition of agency?

a. What factors do you consider when enacting, or not enacting, agency in your work?

Round 2
Group 1

1. How do you feel about our constructions of professionalism? Would you add anything, revise anything, or take anything out altogether?

2. In what ways do you identify as a professional, considering the constructions we just discussed, or other characteristics that might not be a part of our existing construction?

Something that I think I skipped over in my line of questioning during my attempt to unpack "agency" was this idea of making decisions in your work, because sometimes taking a stand by making a decision can seem like a gigantic feat.

3. Can you describe your thought process as you made that decision, or make decisions, during your professional workday?

    a. What thoughts, experiences, and priorities factor into your decision-making?

Someone in the last round of interviews described a strong sense of conviction (or whether something is morally right) as influencing whether they would act in a certain way. Can you speak to what influences your decision-making process?

4. Please discuss to what extent you agree with the following statement: "My professional decision-making is based on how much a certain decision will benefit the lives of my students."

5. Please consider your day to day decision-making and discuss to what extent you agree with the following statement: "My decision-making is based on how much a certain act will professionally fulfill me."

6. In your experience as a member of the MTAC…

    a. Have your experiences informed your ideas of professionalism? If yes, how? If no, why not?

b. Have your experiences informed your sense of agency? If yes, how? If no, why not?
c. Have your experiences changed the way you enact your agency in various situations? If yes, please describe.

Round 2
Group 2

1. How do you feel about our constructions of professionalism? Would you add anything, revise anything, or take anything out altogether?

2. What components or aspects of your professionalism matter to you?
    a. And conversely, which aspects of professionalism don't matter that much to you?

3. Do various educational stakeholders perceive professionalism differently? If so, how?
    a. What are various groups' priorities, and how does that impact what happens in education?

4. Has what it means to be a professional changed in your mind?
    a. If so, what caused this change?
    b. If not, why has it not been affected?

5. Has this community, the MTAC, done anything for your understanding of professionalism?

6. What is something memorable, it could be positive or negative, from your involvement in MTAC this year and why is it memorable?

Round 2
Group 3

1. What aspects of professionalism matter to you?

2. Do various educational stakeholders perceive professionalism differently? If so, how?
    a. What are various groups' priorities, and how does that impact what happens in education?

3. Has what it means to be a professional changed in your mind?
    a. If so, what caused this change?
    b. If not, why has it not been affected?

4. Has this community, the MTAC, done anything for your understanding of professionalism?

5. Can you speak to any way that MTAC has impacted or influenced your school year?

6. What is something memorable, it could be positive or negative, from your involvement in MTAC this year and why is it memorable?

Round 3

1. Is teachers' professionalism unique or different than other professional work?
    a. If so, how? If not, why?

2. Is talking about teachers' professionalism important?

3. What aspects of your work/professionalism, are most important for you to fight for?
    a. Why are those things important to fight for? Why do they matter so much?

4. Has being a part of MTAC done anything for your individual agency?
    a. How about your sense of collective agency?
    b. Can you share an example of a time this year you enacted some sense of your agency that was different than before you were a part of MTAC? How was it different?

APPENDIX C- Sample Theme Construction

This example includes the codes that informed what eventually became the theme central

to the moral professional agency concept. It emerged from a number of related codes that

emerged over the course of the seven focus group interviews. The codes are listed as they were

named in Atlas.ti and the numbers in parenthesis next to each code represent the number of times

the code was used throughout the interviews. For example, the code "being a professional entails

ethics" was attributed to five different pieces of data, or teachers' statements. In Vivo indicates

that what is in quotations was verbatim what the teacher said.

- viewing morals and values as central to professionalism (6)
- being a professional entails ethics (5)
- enacting agency based on morals (6)
- believing children are moral center (5)
- ethical decision-making (5)
- loving your students (4)
- maintaining focus on students (5)
- InVivo: "it's about the kids" (3)
- InVivo: "it's not about getting in line" (1)

The below paragraph is taken from a memo where I was initially working through how

these ideas fit together. Based on how teachers talked about the concepts of professionalism,

agency, and ethics/morals, I had a sense that they were related, but the connection was still not

quite clear in my mind.

> *6/9/19- I talk about moral purposes and ethical codes in Chapter 1, but the way I had considered this early on was largely removed from concepts of professionalism and agency. But the way that the teachers seem to be talking about their morals and ethics both informing their professionalism and their enactment of agency, I need to focus some interview questions on whether teachers are conscious of this.*

> *6/26/19- What has been an overwhelmingly important theme throughout these interviews is how closely related teachers' morals and values are to how they perceive and understand their professionalism, as well as how they navigate their professional world and work.*

The following week, over two focus group interview sessions, these two codes were added that brought things into focus:

- enacting agency based on "professionalism" (3)
- professionalism- doing what is best for students (2)

I sat down after the focus group interview and sketched out the moral professional agency framework beginning with two of the two-concept interactions (professional agency and moral professionalism) and then added the third interaction (moral agency) to create the three-concept interaction of moral professional agency. The teachers describing ways in which they enacted their agency based on their views of professionalism (professional agency), and viewing professionalism as grounded in a set of morals about doing what is best for their students (moral professionalism) brought these concepts to life, and directly informed the development of the framework.