THE 21ST CENTURY EDUCATOR: AN EXPLORATION OF THE COMMUNICATION PRACTICES OF AN “ARCHITECT OF LEARNING”

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Under the Supervision of Professor Nobuya Inagaki
Under the Mentorship of Dr. Heather Crandall

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By
Darlene Wilson
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We the undersigned, certify that we read this thesis and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree Master of Arts.

Thesis or Project Director

Faculty Mentor

Faculty Reader

Gonzaga University
MA Program in Communication and Leadership Studies
Abstract

The 21st century has driven many changes in the classroom and to the teacher of yesterday. Existing teacher identities are in limbo as educational systems morph from dominant beliefs and ideologies to meet the new demands of a knowledge economy. The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers’ perceptions of their communication practices as 21st century educators. In particular, research focuses on teachers’ views of the province of Alberta’s vision of “teacher” as an *architect of learning*, and is explored via semi-structured personal interviews and classroom observations. Although there is ample research on teacher identity and issues related to teacher identity, there is little information to date examining new metaphors for teachers in the 21st century. The symbolic interactionist frame perspective offers a lens on how teachers use language, meaning, thought, and performance in current and future identity construction. The results indicate that teachers do not share common perceptions of the *architect of learning* metaphor, which in turn has implications for future development and performance of the new role. Continued dialogue on the issue is recommended.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Throughout their careers, teachers are continually engaged in creating themselves as teachers (Coldron & Smith, 1999, p. 712) as expectations for both teachers and education continually shift. Research over the past three decades suggests the current model of schooling, rooted in the economic, educational, and cultural norms of the early 20th century, “no longer adequately meets the needs of young people or of contemporary Canadian society” (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009, p. 6). In an address to Alberta Education’s Inspiring Education Fall Forum (October, 2009), Daniel Pink offered this insight from Dr. Richard Moniuszko, Deputy Superintendent of Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia: “We need to prepare children for their future, not our past” (as cited in Alberta Education, 2010, n.p.). The meteoric shift into the knowledge economy calls for significant changes to the nature of teaching and education itself, and—fundamentally—for a new skill set for new times (Trilling, Fadel, & Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009, p. 3). Historically, education has been subject to continual assessment and the consequential adoption of the latest and greatest trends to enhance opportunities for teacher-learner success. Teachers are often challenged to adapt to these trends as required by those esteemed with the power to make such changes. Recently, much of this evolving identity focuses on efforts to improve teachers’ technological competencies to fit the 21st century knowledge economy (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010). Although the need for technological savvy is irrefutable in most educational circles, a focus on progressive student-teacher communication practices and dialogue can also be seen as integral in the
quest for transformational educational practices, particularly as proposed in high school classrooms in Alberta.

The Future of Teaching in Alberta (The Alberta Teacher’s Association, 2011) stakes Alberta’s claim as a global leader in educational achievement, and “reaffirms the timeless virtues of teaching while embracing and advancing the need to change the ways in which they are sometimes realized” (p. 5). Recent experiential pilot programs have evolved from a focus on school scheduling and organizational practices to a critical analysis of current educational practices and a movement toward re-thinking schooling (Alberta Education, 2011). Beginning in 2009, the Alberta High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project (AHSFEPP) was one such initiative that offered high schools some leeway in terms of how courses and credits are delivered, which in turn has allowed for schools to consider new approaches that “deviated from their past practices” and “create[d] the space” necessary for innovation (Fijal, 2013, p. 3). Although this initiative alone is not sufficient to transform educational practices, it is a critical step in working toward Alberta’s long-term vision focused on engaged thinkers, ethical citizens, and an entrepreneurial spirit (Alberta Education, 2010, pp. 5-6).

The Canadian Education Association’s publication What Did You Do In School Today? Teaching Effectiveness: A Framework and Rubric (Friesen, 2009) confronts teacher identity, and suggests that teachers today are most effective as “designers of learning,” able to use effective teaching practices that centre on learning opportunities thoughtfully and intentionally designed to engage students both academically and intellectually (p. 4). Educators are being called upon to create new learning environments that suggest the new teaching role is a “guide” or an “architect of learning”
(Alberta Education, 2010, 2011; Fijal, 2013). The focus of this research was on how teachers use communication practices and performance to construct their identities, and how that might need to change to meet 21st century needs as identified in Alberta.

**Importance of the Study**

The past decade has seen several studies devoted to defining the needs of the 21st century learner and how schools and curriculum must change to meet those needs; there has been notably less exploration as to the identity and role of the 21st century teacher as a key player in this shift. Specifically, there has been little research into how this new identity is communicatively constructed. Palmer (2007) stresses the need to pay as much attention to the person who teaches as to what is taught and how it is taught, in order to best develop teachers and support existing teachers. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) highlight the link between identity and agency by suggesting a teacher’s realization of his or her identity, in performance within teaching contexts, results in a sense of agency or empowerment to move ideas forward, reach goals, or even transform the context (p. 183). It seems obvious to note the integral role that teachers play in the educational system. It follows, then, that how we prepare teachers to ensure teaching excellence would need to change to align with current policy shifts (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 27). This study desired to uncover teachers’ perceptions of this new role as architect of learning in an effort to give teachers a voice in how this identity will be performed, but to also affect change in teacher professional development and teaching training.

**Statement of the Problem**

As teachers prepare for a fundamental shift in their role before students and within society, there are several problems that must be addressed. How will teachers
interpret this new identity? How will they communicate and perform this new role? What will this look and sound like? Perhaps part of this issue lies not within teachers themselves, but within the cultural expectations of society. “There are thousands of brilliant well-intentioned leaders in Canada pushing the edges of innovation in their schools, but they are working within a system that continues to value conformity, compliance, and control over creativity, risk-taking, and critical thinking. Collectively, we should be forging ahead, but our eyes are too often fixated on the rear-view mirror” (Canuel, 2013, para. 2).

Definitions of Terms Used

Architect of Learning: “In a system that is more learner-centered and competency based, Albertans see the role of the teacher changing from that of a knowledge authority to an architect of learning—one who plans, designs and oversees learning activities. The teacher would consider the interests, passions, talents and natural curiosities of the learner. He or she would inspire, motivate and plant the seeds for life-long learning” (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 7).

Dramaturgical performance: Goffman’s (1959) metaphor of social interaction as a dramaturgical performance (self as performance) allows a view on how teachers, as actors, negotiate their identity publicly in their interactions with others via social settings, appearance, and manners of interacting.

High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project (HSFEPP): In response to input from those in the educational field, Alberta Education embarked on project with sixteen high schools throughout the province. The purpose of this four-year (2009-2013) project was to provide participating high schools with the opportunity to organize their schools
with the removal of the current 25 hours of face-to-face instruction per course credit restriction (Alberta Education, 2011).

**Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans:** A report from the Inspiring Education Steering Committee that outlines a long-term vision for Alberta’s education system.

**Propositions:** General statements that express a judgment or opinion, and serve as initial codes for organizing data in qualitative research (Yin, 2013).

**Symbolic interactionism:** Blumer (1969) coined the term symbolic interactionism, and focused on the three core principles of meaning, language, and thinking. Symbolic interaction is the ongoing use of language and gestures in anticipation of how the other will react; a conversation (Griffin, 2012, p. 54).

**Organization of Remaining Chapters**

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 2 introduces the philosophical assumptions and theoretical basis of the research study, an exemplary review of the literature, and the rationale and research questions. Chapter 3 presents the scope and methodology of this qualitative study, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 reveals the results of the study, presents the themes that emerged from the data, discusses the findings, and offers meanings and implications of the findings given the literature and theory that guided the research. Chapter 5 provides the conclusions of the study and how they relate to current research in the field, including the limitations of the study and recommendations for research.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Philosophical Assumptions

Aristotle claimed metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else (as cited in Ng & Bradac, 1993, p. 137). As a researcher, I hold a fundamental belief in the potential power of the metaphor as a “[model] for thinking about social and physical objects and for communicating a complex set of attributes in a shorthand that can be readily understood” (p. 138). Two research traditions have inspired my research on the proposed teacher metaphor architect of learning: the critical tradition, which sees communication as a reflective challenge of unjust discourse; and the socio-cultural tradition, which sees communication as the creation and enactment of social reality (Griffin, 2012). The heart of critical theory seeks to understand taken for granted systems, power structures, and dominant beliefs and ideologies; it desires to uncover and question oppressive social conditions and power arrangements to promote a freer and more fulfilling society (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008, p. 46). Critical social theorists imagine an alternative reality for education, and as such are ready to promote the role of criticism in the search for such quality education, not for the purpose of critiquing or criticizing, or to appear as the “ultimate radical,” but instead to promote dialogue, debate, and openness to different ideas, with a commitment to the democratic process (Leonardo, 2004, p. 14).

Teaching has been described as a paradoxical profession; its essential qualities are eternal, yet it is always being subjected to change (The Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2011). And changing it is. But the critical perspective suggests that a shift in teacher identity will not be easy, as traditional teacher roles based on power and control of knowledge are culturally entrenched within educational pedagogy. The movement from
traditional teacher-focused pedagogy toward inquiry and relationship (Freire, 2000; Friesen, 2009; hooks & Jhally, 1997) demands a critical shift in thinking that challenges the “politics within the production of knowledge” (Deetz, 2000). This requires that teachers re-consider current identities based solely on power and control of knowledge (Foucault, 1972, 1980a, as cited in Deetz, 2000); resolve the teacher-student contradiction; and consider a problem-posing pedagogy in which learners are co-creators of knowledge (Freire, 2000). Ironically, teachers seem both disadvantaged and advantaged during this process. The critical perspective provides a necessary framework for understanding how communication has commonly been used to establish hierarchical relationships between teachers and students (e.g., control language), yet is the genesis for the transformational teaching practices of the identifiable future. In a learner-focused age, educators need more than just technological tools to engage in change productively (Fullan, 1993, p. 12), and there should be no assumptions made that there is a movement to do so.

**Theoretical Basis**

As teachers move toward creating new learning environments focused on the balance between talking to learners and talking with them (Freire, 2000), it becomes essential to study the corresponding communication practices that teachers use (and might use) in their interactions that contribute to current and potential new teacher identities. Thus, to frame this study I have drawn on the work of researchers and theorists to investigate the research question through the lens of symbolic interactionism (SI) and dramaturgical performance. Symbolic interactionists, such as Mead (1934),
primarily explore *identity* as a component of *self*—the most public aspect of self. Identity exists as a more social conception within some form of social structure.

**Symbolic Interactionism**

Blumer’s interpretation of Mead’s (1934) early work in SI provides an appropriate theoretical framework to evaluate teachers’ concept of *self* by focusing on the three core principles of *meaning*, *language*, and *thinking*. The symbolic interactionist perspective highlights the symbolic meaning that people develop and rely upon in the process of social interaction. To a symbolic interactionist, the world is full of meanings.

**Meaning.** Blumer (1969) suggests that people (as *thinking beings*) are motivated to act based on the meanings they assign to people, things, and events; meaning itself is not inherent in objects. In simple terms, human response is based on meaning. People learn meanings and symbols through social interactions, and this assigned meaning affects how they behave, especially in relationships. *Defining the situation* is another way that individuals actively engage in creating the social world. Once people define a situation as real, it is real in its consequences.

**Language.** Meaning is created in the language that people use, both with others and in private thought. Language (as a symbol) allows people to develop a sense of self and to interact with others in the community. Without talk, there would be no self-concept (Griffin, 2012, p. 60). Thus, when people share a common understanding of a symbol, successful interaction happens. A focus on teachers’ use of *language* is crucial, as meaning is negotiated through its use.

**Thought and Self.** Blumer (1969) proposed that an individual’s interpretation of symbols is modified by his own thought processes—and, like Mead (1934), called this
inner dialogue *minding*. This suggested that people have the ability to think about things and interpret them (modify or alter the meanings or symbols), rather than simply reacting instinctually. In doing so, they take the *role of other*. In taking the role of the other and seeing ourselves from others’ perspectives, our responses come to be like others’ responses, and the meaning of the *self* becomes a shared meaning. Blumer defined the self as a continual process of combining the “I” (subjective self) and “Me” (objective self). *Role-taking* is the ability to see oneself as an object—to be able to see how others perceive oneself, and allows individuals to monitor and coordinate personal behavior in order to facilitate interaction with others and also to anticipate the responses of other individuals. *Role-conflicts* are situations in which there are conflicting expectations about a specified role.

*Society.* Although Blumer (1969) believed that society is socially constructed through human interpretation, and consists of individual actors who make their own choices, he argued that the world can and does “talk back” (p. 22). He believed that culture shapes and constrains conduct, but is also the product of conduct. The *generalized other* is the mental image of oneself that is based on expectations and responses from others (and society)—or the image of *self* seen in other people’s reactions. This lens provides the opportunity to uncover and challenge existing teacher beliefs and practices that both limit emancipation in schools and potential teacher agency.

**Dramaturgical Performance**

Goffman’s (1959) metaphor of social interaction as a *dramaturgical performance* (self as performance) allows a view on how teachers negotiate their identity publicly in their interactions with others via social settings, appearance, and manners of interacting;
he referred to these as *identity claims*. Goffman saw a connection between the acts that people put on in their daily life and theatrical performances. Like symbolic
interactionists, his “actor” attributes meaning to symbols and actions of others. These performances include the facets of *impression management* (on front and back stages), including *facework*, and the use of *sign vehicles* (social setting, appearance and manner of interacting) as part of teachers’ presentations to others.

**The Literature**

Given the research question, and in consideration of the immense research on teachers and identity, an exemplary literature review was conducted to focus on the following topics: (1) a critical view of teaching and teacher identity, (2) current themes on teacher identity, (3) challenges in defining teacher identity, (4) teacher identity in changing times, (5) teacher identity using metaphor, and (6) teacher identity in performance. The literature revealed a number of common themes related to how teachers see themselves, the challenges of thinking about identity, and the value of knowing identity. Although the scope of the review is limited, it revealed research gaps from the symbolic interactionist perspective and identified challenges teachers face in the new age of education.

**A Critical View of Teaching and Teacher Identity**

**Critical Pedagogy.** It seems logical to begin by acknowledging that traditionally, teachers get their identity from cultural expectations. Critical reflection has long been a part of standard teaching practice (Freire, 2000; Howard, 2003; Palmer, 2007; Walkington, 2005), and the role of critical thought has emerged as prevalent in the search for quality, emancipatory education (Freire, 2000; Leonardo, 2004). Critical pedagogy
pinpoints the cultural politics of schooling as fundamental to teacher’s identity, focusing on the ways in which dominant classes continue to use power to disenfranchise based on race, class, and gender (Apple, 1982; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Freire, 2000). Miller Marsh (2003) describes the “fashioning and re-fashioning” of teacher identity as a “patching together” of fragments of dominant discourses of the day (p. 8), and the changing traditional configurations of power (Miller Marsh, 2002). But Leonardo (2004) reminds us, “a pedagogy centered only on critique becomes a discourse of bankruptcy, a language devoid of resistance or agency on the part of students and educators” (p. 16).

Bussey (2008) identifies the key to the future success of Alberta’s teaching profession and its organization as the ability to “navigate” the “politics of fear and hope” that permeate most discussions about the future of education (cited in The Alberta Teacher’s Association, 2011, p. 35). Moving forward, he identifies the main task for Alberta teachers, as members of the Alberta Teacher’s Association (ATA), to “refute the view that schools are ‘fortresses’ and that the purpose of education is to prepare students to do ‘battle through life’” (p. 35).

**Critical Pedagogy in Practice.** Since Freire (2000) saw education as a form of indoctrination and suppression, he proposed a *pedagogy of the oppressed*, which requires the creation of learning processes to help individuals develop themselves and build better lives through transformation and empowerment, rather than conforming to dominant views and values (see also Kellner, 2003). **Fundamental to** Freire’s (2000) research was the recognition that freedom begins by acknowledging a system of oppressive *relations*, and one’s own place in that system (Burbules & Berk, 1999). Accordingly, he laid the groundwork for a closer examination of student-teacher relationships by proposing a
necessary level of consciousness that begins with a critical awareness of the dichotomy in existing identities of oppressor (teacher) and oppressed (student) roles, with the possibility of reformed pedagogy in which students become co-creators of knowledge. Contrary to the traditional didactic approach to teaching, which primarily involves lecturing and is essentially teacher-centered (Entwistle, 1997), in discussions on present and future education critical educators propose a less hierarchical, dialogical language, one built upon the praxis of words that involves reflection and action (Freire, 2000); a language based on critique and possibility (Leonardo, 2004; Pineau, 1994); a language based on inquiry and action (McLaren, 1988); and a language of transcendence (Leonardo, 2004), or hope (Giroux, 1983; Freire & Freire, 2004). Critical theorists have championed the language of possibility, aimed at transforming the existing social order via democratic educational practices (Giroux, 1988). Freire (1998) proposes that educating involves a “passion to know that should engage us in a loving search for knowledge” (p. 4), one in which “learning can no longer be seen as a “one-way exchange where ‘we teach, they learn’” (Friesen, 2009). However, Burgoon and Miller (1985) propose that listeners (e.g., students) have expectations about the kind of language communicators (e.g., teachers) will and should use, and violations of this might challenge teacher identity (in Ng & Bradac, 1993, p. 55). Leonardo (2004) advocates critical social theory in education as a means to address ongoing inequalities and to foster quality education, growing students’ capacities to “question, deconstruct, and then reconstruct knowledge in the interest of emancipation” (p. 12).

Recent research supports the need for teachers to focus on collaborative approaches to build better relationships, opportunities, and solutions for learning (Fijal,
Fullan (1993) suggests that educators can effectively act as change agents if given the tools to engage in change productively. Day (2002) referred to this as “opening up possibilities for language and learning in defiance of the dull routines” dominant in schools today (p. 211). Brookfield and Preskill (2005) offer that often instructors dominate classroom discussions because of institutional or cultural expectations—they feel pressure that this domination is an expected role. Instead, they suggest that instructors should not see themselves as the “class’s repository of knowledge,” (p. 198), but identify instructor responsibilities to “model the dispositions of critical discussion while assisting the class in collaboratively exploring the material to be learned” (p. 198). Although this research represents instruction and learning at post-secondary levels of education, where students are assumed to have the maturity necessary to more fully engage in discussion, it remains to be seen whether teachers can employ similar strategies in high school classrooms, and whether teachers have the courage to step back and transfer authority to students, and the candor to acknowledge students’ needs for independence (Johnson, 2006).

Current Themes on Teacher Identity

Over the past two decades there is a growing body of educational research focused on teacher identity and issues related to teacher identity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink, & Hoffman, 2012; Clarke, 2009; Flores & Day, 2006; Hamman, Gosselin, Romano, & Bunuan, 2010; Veen & Lasky, 2005; MacLure, 1993). The scope of this paper provides an introductory discussion on the diversely discussed topic of teacher identity, ultimately targeting the
recent educational focus on the interests, talents, passions and natural curiosities of the learner (Alberta Education, 2010; Freire, 2000) as a motivating factor for emerging studies on new teacher identities necessary for changing times (Fijal, 2013; Johnson, 2006; Smits, 2012). Amongst the current themes on teacher identity are specific studies focus on how identity is negotiated and shaped via teacher conversation, narrative, and discourse (Alsop, 2006; Cohen, 2008, 2010; Smit, Fritz, & Mabalane, 2010; Zembylas, 2003), and through dialogical reflective practice (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Farrell, 2011; Freire, 2000; Larrivée, 2000; Walkington, 2005). Teachers’ professional identity has been described characteristically as subject matter expert, pedagogical expert, and didactical expert (Beijaard et al., 2000). A sense of professional identity has been linked to self-efficacy, motivation, and commitment to the profession (Beijaard et al., 2000; Canrinus et al., 2012).

The Challenge of Defining Teacher Identity

Within the realm of teaching, identity has been explored endlessly and across varying disciplines (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009); while most educational researchers choose a definition within which to frame their work, others lack a solid definition of the concept or related concepts in the research process (Beijaard et al., 2000, Beijaard et al., 2004). A universal definition of teacher identity appears somewhat elusive—a Holy Grail of sorts—and researchers continually search to find it (Smit et al., 2010). Most researchers propose that clearly defining teacher identity is a challenge (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004) because of the multi-faceted, complex, and confusing nature of identity—even before any attempt is made to determine how it influences teachers’ learning, practices, and work. Literature commonly notes the
distinction between professional identity (teacher identity) and personal identity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beijaard et al., 2004) or presents a combined personal-professional view (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) or unavoidable interrelationship (Day, 2002); and very often focuses on identity perceptions and formation in pre-service or novice teachers (Alsop, 2006; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Flores & Day, 2006; Pinnegar, Mangelson, Reed, & Groves, 2011) for the purpose of bettering existing teacher education programs (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Doecke, 2004) and professional development (Coldron & Smith, 1999).

Postmodern thought is strongly held in current studies on teacher identity, and predominantly agrees that teacher identity is not fixed or stable, but shifts over time and with context (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beijaard et al., 2004; Day, 2002; Flores & Day, 2006); is a relational phenomenon (Beijaard et al., 2004); is dynamic (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004; Cohen, 2010); is influenced by years of experience in the profession (Canrinus et al., 2012); and is far from a linear process (Flores & Day, 2006). Sachs’ (2005) definition summarizes these views: “Importantly, teacher identity is not something that is fixed nor is it imposed; rather it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience” (as cited in Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p. 178)). Kelchtermans (2009) prefers the phrase “self-understanding” to identity, and agrees that teacher professional identity is related to how teachers see themselves as teachers based on their interpretations of interactions with their context. He suggests that teacher self-understanding includes a “future perspective,” which reveals a teacher’s expectations about his/her future in their job. This confirms the “ongoing interactive process of sense-making and construction,” and how “one’s actions in the present are
influenced by meaningful experiences in the past and expectations for the future” (p. 263). Part of the experience and struggle of teaching is continually constructing a sustainable identity as a teacher (Coldron & Smith, 1999; MacLure, 1993).

Theoretically, there are few actual studies that specifically target teacher identity via the socio-cultural lens. Veen and Lasky (2005) uses the socio-cultural approach to analyze teacher identity, agency, and professional vulnerability within secondary school reform; Smit & Fritz (2008) uses symbolic interactionism as a frame in their ethnographic study to explore and explain how teachers make meaning of their professional lives and forge that identity in their educational landscape (p. 100), and find that personal, situational and social challenges (and narratives), “appropriated in the core principles of language, thought, and meaning, shed light on how teacher identity is forged” (p. 98); and MacKinnon (2005) uses symbolic interactionism as a frame for judging the social constructivist potential of learner-centered chemistry software.

Beauchamp & Thomas (2009) suggest that identity development for teachers involves an understanding of self and a notion of that self within an outside context such as a classroom or a school, and suggest, “a teacher’s identity is shaped and reshaped in interaction with others in a professional context” (p. 178).

Teacher Identity in Changing Times

Because education is in a constant state of flux, “besieged by public condemnation of current educational practices” (Pineau, 1994, p. 22), a discussion of revolving teacher identity to meet educational reform seems necessary, especially if we are to consider how teachers might cope with these changes (Beijaard et al., 2004; Smit et al., 2010) and implement innovations in their teaching practices (Beijaard et al., 2000).
Amidst recognition that the “new right managerialist agendas now acknowledge widespread teacher disenchantment and stress and its effects upon the quality of teaching and learning” (Day, 2002, p. 685), calls for teachers to continually construct, sustain, and renew identities continue, with little to no acknowledgement of the effects on teachers emotional and intellectual identities (Day, 2002). Current research and programs based on educational reform focus heavily on the learner and the latest in technology and digital literacy (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010; Friesen & Jardine, 2009; enGauge, 2003), including teacher professional identity development via social networking technologies (Luehmann & Tinelli, 2008), but have yet to address the identity perceptions, concerns, and needs of the 21st century teacher as a professional in the new knowledge economy. Friesen (2009) highlights the need to prepare teachers for the 21st century by focusing on what it means to teach (and learn) in increasingly networked, technology-rich, digital classrooms, and develop new images and acquire new expertise to design and facilitate meaningful learning with technology, yet current studies make no mention of how teachers might need to develop or adjust identities and concurrent practices (specifically using language and performance) to meet this new challenge.

**Teacher Identity Embedded in Metaphor**

*The good, the bad, and the ugly.* Martinez, Sauleda, & Huber (2001) suggest, “professionals in a given field are influenced by the central metaphors or archetypes which circulate throughout their field” (p. 966), and teachers are no different. In contrast to post-modern thinking, by definition, metaphors are social or cultural constructs and are thus considered beyond the control of professionals, such as teachers. Although Pineau (1994) presents one view of the theoretical use of metaphor as problematic, with
reference to prevalent (culturally accepted) workplace metaphors which increasingly
dehumanize the educational experience and progressively devalue teachers (p. 4, see also
Martinez et al., 2001), and Phillips (1996) warns of becoming “sucked into [the] self-
sustaining whirlpool of thinking guided by metaphors” (p. 2011), there is ample research
that recognizes the positive use of metaphor to explore and widen understandings of
teacher identity, as a “vehicle for considering teaching” (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p.
182). Pineau (1994) also offers that metaphors link teacher personal and professional
knowledge and serves to translate theory into practice (p. 12). In her research on the
millennial teacher, Johnson (2006) proposes that metaphors help show us our
assumptions and priorities; a good operative metaphor brings all things into focus (pp.
10-11). Significantly, research has revealed a powerful link between teaching metaphors
and teacher action, suggesting that new metaphors are “an essential mechanism of the
mind” (Martinez et al., 2001, p. 965); provide a blueprint of thinking about teaching and
learning (p. 965); influence the atmosphere in the classroom (p. 974); and simply, are
crucial in generating new ideas (p. 967). Pinnegar et al., (2011) argue that since
metaphors heavily affect “potential plotlines” for teacher-student interaction, they might
be considered for the purpose of teacher training.

**Common teaching metaphors.** Research has revealed a swell of recent teacher
and teaching metaphors (Alger, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2000; Johnson, 2006; Martinez et
al., 2001, Pinnegar et al., 2011), most commonly identified through research methods
such as dialogue or survey of both rookie and experienced teachers. Beijaard et al.
(2000) present the teacher as a subject matter, pedagogical, or didactical expert. Pinnegar
et al. (2011) identify twelve “metaphor plotlines,” describing both the role of the student
and teacher, as: teacher as celebrity, creator, expert, friend, leader, learner, mentor, nurture, performer, redeemer, scaffold, and self-sacrificer. Johnson’s (2006) narrative presents the teacher metaphor as a combination of cultural critic, midwife, and resource, concluding that teaching metaphors are personal and contextual. Alger’s research (2009) presents the metaphor of teaching as guiding, nurturing, molding, transmitting, providing tools, and engaging in community. Pineau (1994) summarizes a decade of educational research (mid 1980s—mid 1990s) as primarily presenting the teacher as actors, artists, or directors. Sachs (2003) identifies two forms of teacher professional identity: entrepreneurial (the desired product of managerialist agendas) and activist (inquiry-oriented, collaborative classrooms), the latter of which desires to transcend the narrowness of current reform agendas (as cited in Day, 2002, p. 681). Although this limited research suggests that teachers see themselves metaphorically, it cannot be assumed that all teachers do so unless specifically asked or directed to consider themselves as such.

Alger (2009) found that approximately two-thirds of teachers will change their conceptual views of teaching over the course of their careers (p. 750), and, correspondingly, her research focused on an evolution (of sorts) as: envisioned teaching metaphors prior to teaching; current teaching metaphors (what is happening in classrooms); current desired teaching metaphors (how teachers wish they could teach); and relationships between envisioned, currently used and currently desired metaphors (pp. 746-47). Alger (2009) also identified obstacles that teachers’ envision as preventing them from achieving their aspired metaphors for teaching, as: students, curriculum, home and community, curriculum, lack of resources, and administration (p. 749).
The value of metaphors for teachers and teaching. Martinez et al. (2001) propose collaborative, reflective approaches whereby colleagues share their metaphors of education, so that they can be used as “stepping stones to a new vantage point from which a teacher can look at his or her own practice as educator from a new perspective” (p. 974). Such operative metaphors might allow teachers a framework within which to construct their professional world. Martinez et al. (2001) note the limitations of simply examining existing metaphors, and suggest that stimulating new orientations and insights relative to teaching metaphor might require additional guidance and training for student or pre-service teachers, although there is no mention of such for practicing or experienced teachers.

For the purpose of this study, and specifically in reference to the metaphor teacher as architect of learning, it is noted that Martinez et al. (2001) suggest that metaphors that apply the constructivist perspective in a literal sense, that is, using the words from the field of architecture—are rare (e.g. the language of construction). Within the scope of this research it is noted that there was no information on imposed metaphors (those given or dictated to teachers) in times of reform, although it is recognized that critical analysis would assume conventional or cultural metaphors (imposed by society) for teachers do exist. In their presentation of “the three story intellect,” Fogarty and McTighe (2001), conclude, “teachers, as architects of the intellect, leave a three-story legacy” (p. 167). Murgatroyd (2009) coined the term imagineers to describe the forward-thinking central role that teachers will need to play in redesigning teaching and learning in Alberta (cited in The Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2011, p. 36). Alger (2009) concludes positively that there is a reduction in teacher-centered conceptual metaphors
Identity Via Teaching as Performance

Once the proverbial *sage on the stage*, teacher identity is often linked to teacher performance, or how teachers *perform* their professional roles. McKinney and Giorgis (2009) propose that individuals write and speak their stories as a way of *constructing their lives* and *claiming identities*, and conclude that identity and language are linked through personal narratives and life stories, through *identity performances* (p. 111). Perhaps in line with Pineau’s (1994) claim that teaching as performance is at once self-evident and oxymoronic” (p. 4), there is notably less research available regarding the practical application and benefits of studying teaching as performance, other than studies which focus on the performative nature of teaching (Pineau, 1994; Stillwaggon, 2008), with the classroom as the stage and the teacher in the spotlight (Pettersson, Postholm, Flem, & Gudmundsdottir, 2004). Pineau (1994) summarizes that performance as an instructional metaphor and a pedagogical method have been presented almost exclusively as strategies to enhance instructional communication, and, as such, “[diminish] the complexity of both instructional and performative phenomena” and “[impoverish] both [the] educational and performative experience,” which results in a devaluation of the intellectual value of teaching (Pineau, 1994, pp. 5-7). Significantly, Pineau (1994) proposes a new look at the *performance* metaphor within the field of performance studies, focusing on how instructional narrative, teacher metaphors, kinesthetic learning, and critical pedagogy (p. 6) might enhance performance-centered instruction in the classroom. Pineau (1994) asks: How might the disciplinary knowledge of performance
studies enrich pedagogical uses of performance as both metaphor and methodology? What features of performance can be translated into educational contexts and what kind of studies are needed to test the applicability and the limitations of the theatrical metaphor? (p. 9). It is noted that, other than mention of key concepts, there is little research available that directly applies Goffman’s dramaturgical performance to teachers and teaching today.

Roles in performance. Stillwaggon (2008) proposes the idea of teacher identity as immersed in the teaching role as defined by institutional authority, and discriminatively uses Gallop’s (1995) performative definition of teacher as a pre-existing role—one that “precedes the person who teaches to such an extent that the characteristics of the role have priority over the characteristics of the ‘volitional subject’ presumed to lie behind the mask,” (cited in Stillwaggon, 2008, p. 74) to prove that the teacher’s role is ultimately defined by the expectations of her audience (p. 81). Pettersson et al. (2004) also discuss prevalent culturally defined roles, yet propose that teachers also have the freedom to choose their own approach to professional tasks, with the awareness that every word and action within these roles belongs to as much to the context (the role and cultural expectations assigned to this role) as they do to the teacher (Gudmundsdottir, 2001, cited in Pettersson et al., 2004). Pinnegar et al. (2011) identify the designation of roles as unidimensional (p. 640), and Pineau (1994) suggests that the idea of rigidly identified teacher roles ignores the interactive and relational component of the teacher and students (p. 67), which have been identified as key to learning success (Friesen, 2009). Pineau (1994) summarizes that analogies between teaching and performance have a “reductive, actor-centered perspective that diminishes the complexity of both
performative and instructional phenomena” (p. 3), and suggests the need to rethink
performance as a generative metaphor for educational research, by looking at the
intersection between instructional communication and performance studies (p. 3).
Research specifically using Goffman’s dramaturlogical performance as a lens to view
teachers and teaching is limited. In their limited discussion of Goffman’s theatre model,
Pettersson et al., (2004) noted that improvisational acting has traits in common with
classroom performance, and they highlight the social roles played by teachers. Pineau’s
(1994) presentation of teaching is performance furthers the concept that actors socially
construct their audiences, and thus require critical reflection of the implications of their
enactments (p. 13), in their “multiplicity of roles, both within and without instructional
contexts, that teachers assume in the course of their professional lives” (p. 15). He
acknowledges that performance recognizes that identities are always “multiple,
overlapping ensembles of real and possible selves who enact themselves in direct relation
to the context and communities in which they perform” (p. 15).

Rationale

With an underling “realist orientation” (Neuman, 2006, p. 95), the focus of this
research is to critically evaluate how teachers use language, communication, and
performance to reinforce their current identities, and how this might need to change to
meet the metaphorical challenge of teacher as architect or planner. Entrenched cultural
and institutional expectations keep teachers stagnated, while 21st century educational
aspirations, particularly in Alberta, promote a strong learner focus in which teachers
become architects or planners of learning. Pineau (1994) suggests a need to re-evaluate
existing educational cultures and question current roles within organizations, including
“how our bodies perform the differentiated statuses we employ in the classroom, and what ‘performative conventions’ are used to ‘reinscribe differences in power, despite our best attempts to create democratic and emancipatory classroom environment[s]”’ (p. 21). This study insists that we do just this.

Deetz (2000) stresses that communication understandings are not learned once but continue to be learned and unlearned throughout life. As such, the Alberta vision for education identifies the following shifts in thinking, processes, and practices (Fijal, 2013, pp. 3-5) that reinforce the need to critically analyze current teacher identities:

- A shift in thinking from the responsibility for teaching to the responsibility for learning.
- A shift in practice from student compliance to student direction.
- A shift in thinking about success in learning from achievement to engagement and achievement; a shift in practice from isolation towards collaboration.
- Leadership that empowers teachers and students as decision makers.

To begin, teachers must increase their awareness of how they use communication to construct their current identities. This shift in thinking requires an increased awareness of the issue of power that runs through all language and communication (Deetz, in Griffin, 2012), and how these communication practices are integral to the construction of traditional teacher identity.

The current push to catapult teachers’ technology skills into the 21st century is only one of the tools necessary for this major transformation in teacher identity. Although Alberta considers itself a leader in educational reform (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2011), the overwhelming majority of current research remains based on
student needs, instructional design, and curriculum (Alberta Learning, 2004; Friesen, 2009; Friesen & Jardine, 2009) with less concern for the prosperity of the teacher in changing times. This organizational focus presents a concern that teachers might become “lost in the shuffle,” under-prioritized, or even ignored in this major educational reform, even though their role is pivotal to the entire educational reformation. As teachers shift identities they risk becoming the “impoverished” in their struggle (Freire, 2000) to “keep up” and feel competent in these newly mandated roles. The significance of acknowledging and addressing teacher identity issues, as well as recognizing the ongoing shifts that will occur, is far-reaching for both teachers and those developing and delivering teacher education programming (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Educators need tools (besides technological expertise) to engage in change productively (Fullan, 1993, p. 12).

Although the topic of teacher identity has prompted vigorous and wide-ranging debate, there is little to no attention given to how new metaphors to meet changing educational times might be interpreted by teachers, particularly the challenge of interpreting a designated or imposed metaphor. What communication practices might accompany this role, and how will teachers’ performances optimize learner and teacher success? Although this literature review includes research from South Africa and Norway to the United States, Hong Kong, and the United Kingdom, it is noted that there is little Canadian content in the mix.

The overarching aim of this research is to begin a dialogue about reflecting, identifying, discussing, and ultimately using appropriate communication practices in the role of architect of learning, as promoted by the recent educational reform in Alberta.
Akkerman & Meijer (2011) stress the importance of teacher self-dialogues to reveal the individual identity struggles and challenges teachers face, in taking up a teaching career, or as a consequence of reform or change in their professional lives (p. 318). The potential impact of this research is monumental, even transformational, in terms of the outcomes for students, teachers (of all levels of experience) and the possibility of quality, emancipatory education in this new age.

**Research Questions**

Due to the monumental changes that 21st century learning will require of teachers, as well as the challenges of culturally dominant roles and identities and little understanding of how communication practices might help shape this new metaphoric identity, the following research questions guide this study:

1. How do teachers use language, communication, and performance to reinforce their current identities?
2. How might these practices need to change to meet the metaphorical challenge of teacher as *architect* or *planner*, as mandated by Alberta Education?
3. What communication practices do teachers associate with the role of architect of learning?
   a. How do teachers perceive this role?
   b. What are the perceived challenges of this role?
4. What is the perceived identity of a 21st century educator in Alberta?
   a. What skills will the 21st century educator require?
CHAPTER 3: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Scope of this Study

This single case study was conducted at a public high school of approximately 650 students and 45 staff in Olds, Alberta, Canada (Olds High School).¹ Olds High School, as part of Chinook’s Edge School Division, is recognized as an Innovative Learning Environment (ILE), and as such is not yet a “typical” school in Alberta or Canada. It is important to note the background of their transition from a “traditional” school to an ILE, as follows:

By working together, and drawing widespread support in the community and beyond, Chinook’s Edge School Division (CESD) and Olds College conceived a plan that materialized over seven years into a $70-million Community Learning Campus (CLC) serving high school, college, and adult learners in Olds and mid-central Alberta. The CLC was selected by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as a case study in its Innovative Learning Environments Project. (Pearson, n.d., para. 3)

Given strict timelines two days were designated for this research. It should also be recognized that during data collection for this study, schools worldwide, but notably in Alberta, and within Canada, were undergoing significant, multifaceted reforms focusing on how we “do school.”

¹ Dr. Sharon Friesen, Vice Dean and the Associate Dean of Graduate Programs in the Faculty of Education at the University of Calgary, recommended Olds High School as an excellent and progressive learning environment for this study, as the staff has several years of experience with the high school flexibility program mentioned in this research.
Participants

Participation in the study was voluntary and was offered to the staff via the interviewer’s point of contact, principal Tom Christensen. Although the intent was to gather a representative or opportunity sampling, purposive sampling (Neuman, 2006, p. 222) inadvertently occurred when the principal recruited teachers for the study based on their qualifications and availability during the two-day interview process. Most teachers indicated that they were chosen due to their experience in the areas of self-directed learning, project-learning, team-teaching, or other related educational enhancement projects over the past several years. As well, all staff indicated that they were quite comfortable with both interviews and observation due to the amount of “traffic” that comes through their school due to its designation as an ILE and model school for Alberta. (Note: The principal shared his intent to offer a sampling of teachers who represented the progressive direction of the school. Given the limited time frame and teachers’ busy schedules, I was pleased to garner seven interviews.)

Interview Participants. The criteria used to identify the seven interview participants (five women and two men) included: (a) they were currently teaching at Olds High School staff, (b) they were currently teaching grades 9-12, (c) they represented a wide range of teaching experience, and (d) they agreed to be interviewed. Participants’ teaching experience ranged from six years to over 30 years in a variety of specializations, including: Humanities (Social Studies and English), Sciences, Math, Building/Construction, Career Counseling, and Administration. Aside from their teaching responsibilities, many of these teachers also sat on professional committees,
coached leadership and sports teams, were subject leaders or led team teaching projects or participated in other professional enhancement initiatives.

**Observation Participants.** Participation in the classroom observation part of the study was voluntary in the sense that the principal offered “free range” to the interviewer, indicating that any and all classrooms were available at any time for random viewing. No data was recorded on observation participants. The interviewer observed a variety of teachers with their classes, including: English 20 (grade 11); Foods 10 (grade 10); Humanities 20 (grade 11); Art 10 (grade 10); Math 10 (grade 10); Psychology 10-2-30 (grades 10, 11, and 12); and Biology 20 (grade 11).

**Methodology**

This case study used *qualitative methodology* and *field research* to investigate the research questions. Because field research is based on naturalism—observing ordinary people and events in natural setting (Neuman, 2006, p. 383)—observing teachers in their high school setting seemed fitting, and offered “rich” insight into “real life communication” and “naturalistic observation” (Caputo, n.d.) of the culture and practices at Olds High School. Immersion in the field, accompanied by taking timely and accurate notes with “thick description,” was key in collecting this field research data (Geertz, in Neuman, 2006, p. 382). The interpretivist approach allowed for an intended emphasis on the perspectives, conceptions, experiences, interactions and sense-making processes of the people involved in the study (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 120) to provide “illumination, understanding, and extrapolation” *to similar situations* through the use of context specific settings (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600). Kidder and Judd (1986) offer the
field researcher’s position as, “what I have found true of the people in this study is likely to be true of any people placed in this situation” (in Hyde, 2000, p. 84).

Individual, semi-structured interviews allowed teachers to talk openly about their communication practices and challenges from a personal knowledge perspective. Because “[t]he intellectual dimension of expert practice is, for most teachers, reflection” (Mayer, 1999, p. 8 in Walkington, 2005), the questioning and dialogue in interviews that allows for reflection makes it an excellent qualitative tool. As well, semi-structured interviews allowed the interviewer to customize the interview to the respondent (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003, p. 231). Unobtrusive observation offered an opportunity to watch and listen to teachers “in the moment” of teaching, and gives the researcher access to participants’ symbols and meanings (Neuman, 2006). Together, these methods were used to gather data about 1) teachers use of language and performance in their classrooms, and 2) teachers’ use of language, communication, and performance to reinforce their current identities, and 3) teachers’ perceptions of the metaphorical challenge of teacher as architect or planner.

Case Study Design

Given the research timeline, an identified group of participants, and the research question, Yin (2013) suggests case study design as appropriate since (a) the focus of the study was to answer “how” and “why” questions; (b) the researcher could not manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; (c) the researcher wanted to cover contextual conditions because she believed they were relevant to the phenomenon under study; and (d) the boundaries were not clear between the phenomenon and context (cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008). Appropriate concern was taken to construct the case—which involved
choosing research questions related to the understanding and solving of the case: what the case is about, and what can be learned by studying it (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Even though a single-case study has been at times disapprovingly described as analogous to a single experiment, rationally it still proves to be a valid study because, in this case, it represents elements of a representative or typical case, where the goal is to capture the experiences of the average person or institution and share these informative “lessons” with others in similar situations (Yin, 2013, p. 47). To ensure that the case had a reasonable scope, I used Binder and Jack’s (2008) recommendations for binding the case, including: limiting the time and place (Creswell, 2003); the time and activity (Stake, 1995); and the definition and context (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Lastly, it is significant to note the element of critical social research in this research process. The purpose of critical social research is not simply to study the social world but to change it (Neuman, 2006, p. 95). This research study’s aim is to empower teachers to face the challenges of a new century of learning and learners.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews with participants addressed all research questions and provided an in-depth exploration into the ways that teachers understood and experienced their changing professional identity. The interviewer showed interest in the responses; encouraged elaboration; engaged in a friendly, conversational exchange; asked open-ended questions; and allowed the member to jointly control the pace and direction of the interview, including jokes, asides, and anecdotes (Neuman, 2006, p. 407). Specifically, teachers were asked the same eleven open-ended questions, with allowance for dialogue
and in-depth probing for further information or description on what was said; this means that each interview varied according to the responses the interviewee chose when answering the questions, as well as the follow-up questions chosen by the interviewer. The interviewer required excellent active listening skills to be able to react appropriately to participant responses. Time constraints allowed for one interview per participant of approximately one hour in length. The interviews took place in a centrally located office in the school; the interviewer took field notes, and each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim. Over six hours of interview conversation were recorded, transcribed, and reviewed numerous times.

**Questioning.** I began with a brief background on the purpose of the study (as graduate research), a review of required consent documentation, some casual chitchat, followed by opening questioning, including questions on their teaching tenure and experiences as a teacher at this school. Focused questioning began by asking specific questions to “confirm” how teachers currently use communication practices and performance to establish their identity today, before moving on to further questioning which discussed how they might communicate and perform as 21st century *architects of learning*. In the process I purposely asked descriptive, structural, and contrast questions (Neuman, 2006) to progressively dig deeper into participant responses. The interview ended with culminating questions about the key concepts in the study. Questions are included as Appendix A.

**Non-obtrusive Classroom Observation**

Time constraints allowed for seven classroom observation sessions, ranging from 10 to 35 minutes in length. These observation sessions were not scheduled and took
place in my unscheduled time between individual interviews—given free range to visit any “class” during this free time. Non-obtrusive observation of participating teachers involved listening, observing, and note-taking (i.e., jotted notes, direct observation notes) in classrooms and open areas as teachers and students interacted. Observation specifically addressed research question number one by observing and recording teachers’ use of language, communication, and performance (to reinforce their current identities). Although the observations were intended to be non-intrusive, both students and teachers often engaged with me to varying degrees during this observation time.

**Trustworthiness**

The intent of trustworthiness in a qualitative research study is to offer the research and findings as “worth paying attention to” (McKinney & Giorgis, 2009, p. 118). Russell, Gregory, Ploeg, DiCenso, & Guyatt (2005) suggest integrating several key elements into case study design to enhance overall study quality or trustworthiness (as cited in Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 556). Most significantly, this included providing enough detail so that readers can assess the validity or credibility of my work. To achieve this, I attempted to ensure that

(a) The case study research question was clearly written, propositions to guide the study were provided, and the research question was substantiated.

(b) Case study design was appropriate for this research question.

(c) Purposeful sampling strategies were appropriate for this case study.

Representative sampling was desired, but purposive sampling was used.
(d) Multiple sources of data were collected and managed systematically. Once field research was completed data was organized logically and then thematically into a case record (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 128).

(e) Data was analyzed correctly. The researcher’s undergraduate degree in education, graduate work in COML, and 25 years of experience and immersion in the education in Alberta increased the potential for data analysis credibility or “truth value” in this particular case study research.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe research “trustworthiness” as comprised of four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (in Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 294). Baxter & Jack (2008) suggest that multiple interviews and observations enhance the credibility of the study by using several data sources to view the phenomena from multiple perspectives. Transferability (or external validity) was addressed in two ways: by using a sampling of a variety of high school teachers (different subject areas and years of experience); and by using “thick description of the phenomenon under investigation to allow readers to have a proper understanding of it, thereby enabling them to compare the instances of the phenomenon described in the research report with those they may have seen emerge in their situations” (Shenton, 2004, p. 70). Dependability was enhanced by fully disclosing the research methods, context, and participant information in appropriate detail. Confirmability is noted as a potential concern, as the time restraints of the study did not allow for key informants to review the draft of the study before submission.
Anonymity and Confidentiality

To ensure confidentiality of all participants, each participant was identified numerically, and their names do not appear in the study (e.g. P1 = Participant 1). Prior to the study participants’ signed a consent form acknowledging their willingness to participate in this study; they were informed that their names remain confidential.

Data Analysis

Case study analysis began early on in the research process, and occurred recursively with the data collection (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010). I used Yin’s (2013) recommendation of data analysis based on pre-formulated theoretical propositions and a respective coding system. These propositions, or general statements that express a judgment or opinion, helped limit the focus of the study, guide the analysis process, and increased the feasibility of completing the project (Baxter & Jack, 2008) in a short time frame. Based on a review of literature, the theoretical framework of the study, and my personal/professional experiences as a teacher, my propositions were:

1. Teachers are generally not aware of how their communication practices, language and performance to construct, reinforce, or give meaning to a certain identity.

2. Teachers’ communication practices/strategies have changed/are changing.

3. Teachers are disadvantaged due to constant bombardment with improved practice movements and revolving ideology.

4. Twenty-first century teaching practices must continue to break down entrenched cultural identities of teachers.
5. Teachers use contemporary educational jargon to discuss teaching and education.

6. Twenty-first century teaching and learning is not all about technology.

7. Transformational teaching is about a new kind of performance—a new way of constructing and communicating a new identity.

These propositions provided a platform for developing a thematic coding scheme, which was used when collecting and analyzing the empirical data. Using Lasky’s (2005) model as a guide, I used a “start list” of constructs, related to the propositions (such as identity and performance) that were considered important to listen for during interviews. This “start list” was used to guide probing questions, as well as serve as initial codes for organizing the data. I kept notes in a logbook on comments unique to individuals, common themes amongst individuals, as well as constructs that were not part of the initial “start list.” Data were coded manually. This thematic analysis allowed for themes to be defined as they emerged from the data (Flores & Day, 2006), which permitted both deductive and inductive processes in the study. Overall, since my goal was to expand and generalize existing communication theory, I made analytic generalizations that were driven by using previously developed theory as a template to compare the empirical results of the study (Yin, 2013). These generalizations were based on my research and theoretical training and twenty-five years of teaching experience, which allowed for several conveniences before, during and after the field work, including (1) an insight into the mind of teachers, (2) a natural camaraderie with the high school staff and students, (3) a high comfort level in a secondary school setting, and (4) a sense of currency regarding teacher issues.
Ethical Considerations

Research that takes place in a school setting, whether it involves students directly or indirectly, must be carefully planned and considered. All concerned parties in the research gave their consent, including participating teachers, administration of the school, the school division, and the researcher’s university. Because of the researcher’s professional relationship with the Superintendent of Chinook’s Edge School Division, there was an existing element of trust and credibility prior to the research launch. A potential ethical issue may have involved those participants who felt pressured to participate because they were directed to by the principal of the school, or those who felt pressured to give desirable results. The researcher minimized potential issues by confirming the voluntary nature of the study with participants prior to interviews or observations, as well as assuring participants of the anonymity of their responses or actions while participating in the study. Most teachers showed little interest in any legal process, such as signing a “human consent form,” and indicated that they had experience in similar research situations and were not concerned with any repercussions.

Field research involves personal involvement with others, and, as such, must demonstrate awareness of several factors. First, participants must be aware of the background and purpose of the research. Second, data must be kept confidential, including names, quotations, and situations. Third, the publication of reporting must be accurate and must not violate privacy, publicize member secrets, or harm reputations (Neuman, 2006, p. 414). The intent of this research was to assist (not harm) teachers by increasing their awareness of communication practices that shape and establish their identity in the era of a new educational vision for educators in Alberta.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE STUDY

Introduction

Olds is a rural, agriculturally based community, and the association between the high school and Olds College (shared facility) creates a “college” feel to the high school campus. During the course of the two-day case study I interviewed seven teachers who met with me in a small office area adjacent to the central gathering area. Interviews ranged from approximately 40-70 minutes, and the atmosphere was conversational. Amongst the scheduled interviews were random visits to seven different “learning environments,” which included traditional classrooms, open areas with couches and tables, and designated “color-coded” pods. Teachers in this study are identified from observation reporting as T1—T8, and from interview reporting as T1—T7. Although some of the same teachers participated in both research methods, there is no correlation between the participant numbers in interviews and observation. Most of the results are from the interview process, and, as such, can be assumed to be interview data unless noted.

To ensure that this report remained focused and dealt with the research questions, I chose one of Yin’s (2013) strategies for reporting the case study: organizing the results by addressing the initial propositions that were established when formulating the study. As mentioned in Chapter 3, I began with seven propositions based on a review of literature, the theoretical framework of the study, and my personal/professional experience as a teacher. My research questions sought to make sense of, or explore, these propositions. In the next section, propositions are used as categorical headings to present
a summary of the research data. It is noted that some propositions emerged as more significant than others.

**Results of the Study**

**Proposition 1: Teachers are generally not aware of how their communication practices, language and performance to construct, reinforce, or give meaning to a certain identity.**

Teachers were asked to consider their current identities, and how communication, language, and performance contribute (or might contribute) to these identities. Teachers struggled in their responses, as if it was the first time that they had considered the question. None of the responses specifically included communication practices (e.g., good speaker, good listener), other than two participants’ references to nonverbal behaviors. Teachers shared their identity as “how students see me,” (as approachable, calm, humorous, good communicator); “who I am at school” (as a professional, as a team member); “traits I have,” (as caring, traditional, structured); “what is important to me” (have rapport, believe in rigor; prepare kids for future); and/or “who I am as a [whole] person” (teacher as a composite/patchwork of life experiences, teaching as a life calling, teaching as a personal activity/connection). P4 summarized his teacher identity as the “whole person, not separate” (no separation of person from profession), while P7 described her identity as having three components: “professional” (as “part of a team that is very professional”), “in this school” (as “honored to be a staff person” at this “highly regarded” school), and “identity before students” (as “their advocate”).

**Performance.** When asked about their use of language and performance to reinforce their identity, most teachers focused on “performance” more than “language.”
The majority of teachers agreed that they do “perform” in their roles as teachers, and most described their performances in a positive manner, as entertaining, engaging, and powerful. P5 indicated that performance was both “conscious and unconscious.” P3 identified that when “speaking to groups of students, it’s a performance,” and the use of “emphasis, humor, and an engaging way” brings the “audience” into the learning. P1 discussed her team-teaching roles and identified herself in these situations as “silly,” and “not-so-serious,” able to “play off each other” and tell stories and jokes in class. She used the terms “battle right back,” “an act,” and “not rehearsed” to describe the interactions with her team-teaching colleague, and suggested that “kids are entertained” by such performances, which bring energy and enthusiasm to the lesson. She also indicated that these situations (performances) work best when the team-teacher shares a common disposition and teaching philosophy.

Several teachers expressed negative connotations with the concept of performing. P2 indicated that teaching is “not a performance—it is who I am—passionate, excited to share,” and suggested, “some [other] teachers want [the] limelight.” P4 indicated that generally he did not perform while teaching, but acknowledged exaggeration and nonverbal communication (making faces) as potentially performing. He indicated that students have expectations of how a high school teacher will/should “behave.” P5 defined performance as dependent on the class—qualifying her response by indicating that when she felt “safe” she could be more authentic, and less likely to perform. P6 said she tries “not to perform too much” (“act stern or happy when not feeling it”) and indicated that it’s “easier to be myself.” She also stressed the importance of separating the personal from the professional self.
**Language.** Although probed, most teachers did not fully articulate how they use language to reinforce their identity. P2 linked language as positive reinforcement to her identity as a “person who cares.” P5, however, said she was “very aware of the power of words,” used “gender neutral talk,” and felt “banter makes it a fun place to be.” P6 suggested that language and vocabulary should be “simple” so that “students relate better,” and suggested the use of sarcasm to better relate to students. P7 addressed the question of “language” by noting that language is useful to break down the barriers and hierarchy that can exist in student-teacher relationships.

**Proposition 2: Teachers’ communication practices/strategies have/are changing.**

All but two teachers recognized significant communication changes from the time that they were students until today. These two teachers indicated that the “core” of communication remains unchanged: relationships, conversation, and recognition on a personal level. Overall, there was a focus on the word *more*, as: more communication (generally); more of a technological focus to communication; more learning with students; and more of a focus on learning and outcomes—not just on how “quiet things are” or how well a class is controlled. Teachers commented that communication was more personalized; more of a partnership; more equal between teachers and students (there is less of a “line”); more interactive and hands-on; more open and honest (teachers talk about mistakes and even apologize); and more flexible.

As part of the discussion on changes in communication practices, teachers were asked how they currently talk with students. Almost all teachers indicated that they talk to high school students like “anyone,” or like they were adults. P3 added the caveat, “I know they are not.” He identified students as “peers in the learning process,” but
indicated that we “are not on a first name basis—not friends.” P1 noted that there “used to be a line” between teachers and students “which kept you very separate,” yet P2 felt there was still “a line that I’m the instructor—not a drill sergeant or friend.” P7 felt her communication was “firm, but positive,” and “lighthearted, but definite.” Several teachers indicated that they like to tease, use sarcasm, and have fun with students in their interactions, with respect as the basis for the relationship. It was apparent that teachers and students were used to being observed, as was noted by the one teacher’s comment when getting her class’s attention: P2: “We have company. You know what to do.” During observation I noted teachers walking amongst students, chatting comfortably, sitting on tables, often with a coffee cup in hand. In all seven learning environments visited, from traditional classroom to open pod areas, teachers’ talk to students was as they had described in the one-on-one interviews: like students were adults; more relaxed and less formal; informal; relationship-focused; and less hierarchical. Although most teachers seemed comfortable and onboard with the changes in communication practices, there was an underlying sense of caution regarding the impact of those changes on students and themselves.

Proposition 3: Teachers are disadvantaged due to constant bombardment with improved practice movements and revolving ideology.

When asked to discuss the challenges of “becoming” an architect of learning, teachers shared comments that spoke volumes in terms of their struggle to keep up with new practices. They identified these challenges as: dealing with distractions (paperwork, curriculum, and “administrivia”); dealing with budget restraints; not having enough time; keeping up with necessary technology; balancing the demands of a new role; and feeling
like a “jack of all trades.” P2 mentioned feeling “behind the eight-ball” in keeping up with the technology movement; while P6 noted an increased awareness of “constantly improving,” and doing things better has made her “less confident” even though (with experience) she is now a better teacher. Most teachers wholeheartedly recognized the need to be reflective and practice/model life-long learning. Several teachers suggested that new teachers might not accept a change to the role of an architect and its demands, and might not have the necessary commitment and passion to perform this role effectively. Overall, teachers at this school expressed deep levels of satisfaction with the pace of change at their school—although they recognized concerns for teachers and the pace of change generally.

**Proposition 4: Twenty-first century teaching practices must continue to break down entrenched cultural identities of teachers.**

Observation and interviews sought to determine if teachers were aware of traditional practices that might be rooted in society, as well as the movement toward 21st century teaching practices. Although P1 offered this new awareness as, “in this building we are learning with them,” and at times “students are teaching us,” she also noted, almost apologetically, that she still considered herself to be “traditional” and “structured” and there would be no guessing [as to her identity] in her class. Several teachers noted the change from the “teacher stands and teaches—student listens and takes notes and works on worksheets;” (P3) “teachers spoke—students listened—or didn’t”; and (P7) “teacher said—student did.” P1 suggested that today’s teachers “try more” and are “more equal” in terms of their rapport with kids. P3 noted that personalization is the goal—that all students are known by adults in the building; and, that more communication means
there is an “expectation of personalized service—you will make time with me.” Several teachers suggested that teaching today is much more than speaking and lecturing. P5 noted, the days of a “sphere of power” are over, and teachers “can’t sit in their little world,” but must reflect and move on. P6 confirmed that “teachers aren’t islands—they can’t be by themselves,” and must “lose [their] ego, “be open to constructive criticism,” and not be “control freaks.”

Most teachers indicated that 21st century teachers would communicate differently. In contrast, P4 indicated that he did not know if 21st century teachers will or should communicate differently, as teaching is “connecting—and connecting won’t change, and hasn’t changed in thousands of years.” P7 noted that as “technology plays a larger role—the relationship part has to become greater…it doesn’t matter what transpires with technology—success of learning is based on relationships; good learning is still students and teachers—four walls. Success of the learner does not depend on how many smart boards [you have].” Several teachers noted the need for more collaboration and critical analysis with students. P3 proposed planning as key to this process: “collaboration needs to be built in—a time and place. He suggested collaboration as key for both student-teacher and teacher-teacher relationships: “Sharing an office [is like] having an ongoing pedagogical discussion [with team teaching partner] for 20 years.” For teachers this “openness” allows best practices and opportunities for growth to be shared on an ongoing basis.
Proposition 5: Teachers use contemporary educational jargon to discuss teaching and education.

“Teacher talk” seems to unite teachers professionally, and is a reflection of their educational experiences. Teachers used similar language to make sense of their educational experiences. They overwhelmingly agreed that they felt empowered, supported, and able to create change in their current school. They described the current climate as very collaborative and based on teamwork, relationship, rapport and trust between teachers and students, teachers and administration, and teachers together. P3, with 20 years of experience in “non-traditional delivery,” listed his experience(s) at this school as “innovative, less-teacher directed, active learning, cohort learning…21st century learning.” P4 summarized this 21st educational shift as a “partnership” between teachers and students, more “fun and engaged with kids.” P5 offered that this school gave teachers the opportunity to grow “exponentially,” and “practice their pedagogy.” P7 described it as a “culture of caring in a real way—not [just] lip service.” These examples highlight vocabulary unmistakably woven throughout the conversations with all participants.

Proposition 6: Twenty-first century teaching and learning is not all about technology.

Teachers identified several skills in addition to technology as necessary for 21st century teaching and learning. Two teachers championed technology competence as the key factor for success as a 21st century teacher; two others felt that a basic understanding of technology as a tool was required to enhance teaching; and three more indicated that technology, generally, was not important or not so important. P1 felt that the teacher
today can be the “textbook,” and “then we can go from there [with technology].” A few teachers focused on technologies for school purposes, such as Remind 101, GradeBook, website, email, and texting on trips, for coaching purposes, or for communicating with students in off-campus programs. P2 and P5 both indicated that communication technology means it is harder to turn school/work off. Two teachers focused solely on the need to improve communication using technological tools, to (P1) “meet kids where they are now.” There was concern that there will be less face-to-face communication, as teachers (P2) “make use of different modes of learning, although recognizing that this might be in the best interest of the learner.

Many teachers listed the skills of collaboration, flexibility/adaptability, and life-long learning as the top skills for the 21st century educator. P3 elaborated:

None of us can define ourselves as one thing. [School] is interdisciplinary; we must be willing to learn, change, improve, seek answers—constant desire to improve our practice or art. Why? Because our clientele is in a constant state of morphing—they have a different reality—they are digital natives—they share everything. Their life is ‘out there,’ [and] so is their learning. Their lives are collaborative—so must their learning be.

Other responses included the need for authenticity, engagement, personalization, world awareness, creativity, communication, awareness, empathy, and service. Several teachers mentioned the need for honest self-reflection.
Proposition 7: Transformational teaching is about a new kind of performance—a new way of constructing and communicating a new identity.

Most teachers recognized that their identity had evolved over the course of their teaching career, and was still evolving. Most felt that their current role was more transformational—as a role model, mentor, facilitator, or guide. These transformational practices appeared to be linked to the school climate and culture, and are recognized as an emerging theme, and were evident in both interviews and observations. P1 felt that it was “our job” to prepare students to be good citizens,” not “throw a test at you and see what you got.” Several teachers felt more confident with experience: P1 and P3 felt more competent; P5 thought she would “change the world,” and “assumed this would happen,” and regretfully came to realize with experience that “you’ll have victories and defeats,” and realize the “limitations to [your] influence.” P7 saw a change from an identity as a subject matter specialist (e.g., English teacher) to an identity based on passion for students. P4 described the identity change as a “merge to the middle,” or a movement to the norm—but with experience he was now able to set his own norm.

Architect of Learning. As part of a long-term, transformational vision for education in Alberta, Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans (Alberta Education, 2010) suggests the role of the teacher is changing from that of a knowledge authority to an architect of learning—one who plans, designs and oversees learning activities; considers the interests, passions, talents and natural curiosities of the learner; and inspires, motivates and plants the seeds for life-long learning” (p. 7). Teachers were very interested in this metaphor, and most had not heard the term before. Several teachers asked whether the metaphor was intended for the student or the teacher. Two
teachers felt the student would best fill this metaphorical role, as it should be their responsibility and privilege to plan their own educational journey. Others commonly identified an architect of learning as a facilitator, coach, helper, communicator, collaborator, world teacher, and/or designer-planner. Because this was the focal point of the research, each participant response is summarized as follows.

P1 focused on the architect as one who would guide student learning: “not the main source,” and “not communicating knowledge” so much as “how to get knowledge.”

P2 stressed the collaborative nature of the metaphor, suggesting an “architect does not work solely, but as part of a team”—and as such “doesn’t need to know everything, but where to find it—or know the tools.” This architect should be flexible and adaptable with the curriculum in determining how to best meet student needs, and help them see “the bigger picture.”

P3 identified the metaphor as “facilitator/coach” who would “design a platform/system to enable the learner to reach their goals; personalization”…as “their learning is theirs.” He noted that we have “come so far from ‘the class’—and the class [as a space] is just one venue for learning.”

P4 described this as an “apt metaphor.” He supported the concept of a design-build process (“build new or renovate”) from a construction perspective/background. He stressed the importance of helping students “experience things”… “sort through them” and “critically evaluate.” He identified the key role of an architect of learning as one who “interprets the needs of the client,” while consulting and facilitating groups.

P5 described this as a “great metaphor,” even though she felt that the students should be the architect—taking the initiative in the process and “design for themselves
what avenue will engage them most effectively.” She identified the metaphor as a planner or designer—while someone else “executes,” and described it as “building a plane while flying it.” P5 discussed other competencies of an architect of learning as dialogue, listening, organization, and reflection.

P6 felt that an architect of learning should demonstrate and model life-long learning; teach “how to become a good person...how to talk to one another and honestly evaluate what’s going on;” and [teach] all of the individual things that aren’t curriculum described.”

P7 saw the role of the architect of learning as to “build a dream home” while identifying with the client the needs and wants. Essentially—the student brings his learning needs and background experiences, and the teacher thinks of how to best build a learning experience. Communication from “all who inhabit that student’s home,” is essential” (including parents, students, and staff). Dialogue was noted as key to the process.

**Emerging Theme: Culture**

In addition to the propositions already discussed, culture and school environment emerged as a dominant theme. Teachers commented positively on the climate and culture at their school, and many made the link between the school culture and their identity as a teacher. P3 identified the school as a “21st century learning environment,” one where teachers were “open and caring” yet perhaps “overextended—[as] we’re really pushing people [here].” P4 indicated that the principal had done much to create the positive culture, and was “a great guy to work for.” P5 described the culture as having a “hierarchy for a purpose;” where “students don’t see teachers as enemies.”
All teachers felt that teachers in this school communicated differently than teachers in other schools. They noted that Olds High School has a (P3) “different way of doing school,” and commonly listed the following differences: more emphasis on rapport and personal relationship; (staff as) more open and available; more personalization (by staff toward students); more of a team atmosphere; and more relationships that are strong, authentic, and reciprocal. P1 noted the influence of programs like the HSFEPP, citing a flexible timetable, use of space, looping practices, and pods, which “lend to [improved communication] happening.”

Linking identity to school culture. All teachers described the culture of Olds High School very positively as a student-first or student-focused, personalized, open, warm, collaborative, and interdisciplinary culture. P3 and P6 refined their answers to stress that the culture was demanding for both students and teachers—focusing on rigor, academics, and excellence. P6 continued to describe the culture as, “overextended—really pushing people—because we have more personalizing.”

Linking identity to teaching environment. P1 described the physical set up of the school (pods) as integral to the culture, as it created “little communities,” where students have a “sense of belonging,” a “safe place,” where they can “start taking ownership;” P4 called it an “extended family.” She continued to discuss the culture by describing the shared office areas and “Science Park” (lab area) as “amazing for collaboration,” with “no need to set up meetings,” since three or four teachers were just “sitting there talking” without being “forced” (to meet). She talked about the “old way” of teacher isolation, where you’d be sitting “in [your] classroom,” and “catch up on marking and eat your lunch.”
Discussion

This section offers (1) the key findings using the theoretical framework of Blumer’s symbolic interactionism (*meaning/language, and thinking/self*) and Goffman’s dramaturgical performance (*performance*); and (2) a discussion of the meaning and implications of these findings given the literature and theories that informed the work. Because many of these concepts are interwoven, discussion of the concepts may overlap.

Thematic Summary of the Findings

**Theme One: Meaning and Language.** Teachers were intrigued by the recently proposed metaphor *architect of learning*, and often made sense of the metaphor by replacing it with another metaphor (or *symbol*), that already held meaning for them, such as *facilitator, builder, coach, planner,* or *helper.* The evolving meaning of “teacher” is central to this study, and the meaning of the new metaphor, as proposed in Alberta’s vision for education to 2030, is open to interpretation by all. Literature supports the value of teacher metaphors as *shared* understanding by suggesting that they provide a powerful link to teacher action (Bullough et al., 1991; Bullough & Stokes, 1994, in Pinnegar et al., 2011); bring all things into focus (Johnson, 2006); and offer a blueprint for thinking about teaching and learning (Martinez et al., 2001). Blumer (1969) proposed that people act toward people or things based on the meanings that the things hold *for them,* and these meanings are generated over time through human interaction. The source of meaning for symbolic interaction is collective—it is a social product; it is not individually determined nor is it intrinsic to objects. Because *architect of learning* is a new metaphor for Alberta high school teachers, a shared meaning of this role, even amongst this small sampling of teachers, is unlikely. For example, several teachers felt
the metaphor was more suitable for the student, than for the teacher. P3 suggested some hesitation with the term “facilitator” as a new teacher identity due to negative connotations—“some see it as not a teacher,” but in reality it is a “balance” when you “teach less in a direct fashion,” but are “still very involved in directing students’ learning.” This highlights a concern for teachers as they attempt to move away from traditional teacher roles. P4 thought it was an “apt metaphor,” since the roles of both architects and teachers have changed immensely in the past 40 years, and an architect (like a teacher) used to be “a little bit below God—you didn’t push them.” P1 described her meaning of the architect as a facilitator of learning:

I’m not that special...[learners] really don’t need me...a teacher is not the main source [of knowledge]...Our brains aren’t that valuable anymore, with computers...students can come back tomorrow and be smarter than me...We need to collaborate and change teaching and communication styles...[since we’re] not communicating knowledge—we’re communicating how to get knowledge—how to learn.

Ultimately, if teachers do not like the metaphor or see that the new role presents too many challenges, then that meaning will be an obstacle for them moving forward and collectively performing the new role. As well, if interpretations of the new role are not shared throughout society—if there is no shared meaning, those adopting the new role may experience frustration or ultimately fail to enact it as intended. It is noted that the “architect” metaphor is part of a vision for education that “sets high-level direction” but does not “lay out the process for implementation” (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 5). Part
of this process of implementation might involve unpacking the language and meaning of the metaphor itself.

Teachers did not share an awareness of how they use language (or communication) to reinforce current identities, nor how they might use it in a new role as *architect of learning*. Instead they used terminology describing pedagogical practices such as “collaboration” and “personalization,” but did not articulate what this might look or sound like. Blumer’s second premise is that meaning arises out of the social interaction that people have with each other, and these meanings are negotiated through the use of *language*—a system of symbols shared with members of a society, and used for communication with others and to represent oneself. A focus on teachers’ use of language is crucial, as meaning is negotiated through its use. Even the term “communication” held different meanings for participants, whose definitions focused on technology, computers, and social media, not “old-school” practices like talking, listening, and writing. This shows how meanings gradually (or drastically) change as people change. Whether those interpretations are right or wrong does not matter; it is how they are interpreted.

The results from this study indicate that teachers’ language is changing, and new symbols are emerging—from the language they use in their communication with students—to the language they choose to describe their identities and practices. Examples from the observations include:

- Teachers talk to students like they were mature/adults: P1: “If you ever get a chance to, in post-secondary, take a class in Canadian Literature.”
• Teacher language is more relaxed, and less formal: P1: “Look up here for a sec.” “You guys come and grab a laptop.” “Okay, shoot out” (response to a request to ask a question). “Look up here so you don’t mess this up.” P3: “[Student] please get off my chair… I have possession issues.” P4: “At ease.” P8: “Come on, number 22 is easy, guys.”

• Teachers use humor and current pop culture references to engage: P1: “[That is] humorous—not knee-slapper, Hangover kind of funny.” “I know—you are annoyed that the story could have been over two pages ago.” P4: “They talk funny [British].”

• Teacher language is relationship-focused: P4: “You should know this is one of my favorite novels. You will like it.” “What matters? How do you feel about this?” P5: “Darling.” P7: “You know I love you.”

• Teachers language is more equal: P6: “[Student], did I make any other mistakes up here?” “[Student] just told me I wrote something down wrong. Maybe there’s something wrong?”

From the symbolic interactionist perspective, the world is full of meanings. When looking at 21st century teaching identities and practices, the “symbols” teacher, class, classroom, student, curriculum, homework, school, textbook, tools, resources—essentially “the way we do school,” are all up for interpretation. P3 shared: “We have come so far from the class.” He identified students as “peers in the learning process.” Teachers also used “new” language in their discussion of their school (the “palace”) and teaching practices, including: “working Wednesdays,” “self-directed learning,” “quads,” “intense seminars” (not “classes”) and “no homework… homework is a word we don’t
They used common language to describe optimal teaching practices, such as “collaborative,” “interdisciplinary,” “rigorous,” and “personalized.”

Several teachers spoke of the power inherent in language. If, as Blumer says, language is used to represent oneself, several teachers here recognized the change in teacher language in response to students. Teachers noted a different way of talking with students that is less hierarchical and consists of more open, honest dialogue. P5 offered that this “talk” allowed for “relationships of influence” which replace former relationships “coming from a place of power.” She stressed that the relationship of influence is something that people “give to you” whereas “you take power.” P1 noted that this shift in talk might sound like, “wow—I don’t know” (the answer to that), and “I’ve never thought of it that way.”

There is ample literature to support teacher-student collaborative approaches to build better relationships, opportunities, and solutions for learning (Fijal, 2013; Fullan, 1993; Freire, 2000; Palmer, 2007). Pineau (1994) warns: “We cannot enter our classrooms as learners, nor can we empower our students to experience themselves as teachers until we more fully understand the ways in which educational institutions have already politicized our bodies” (p. 21). Ng and Bradac’s (1993) discussion of language expectancy theory (Burgoon & Miller, 1985) suggests that students may expect teachers (traditionally seen as powerful individuals) to exert powerful language—failing to do so might compromise their expected role.

Symbolic interactionists believe that it is only in talking with each other that we can come to assign meaning. Without talk, there would be no self-concept (Griffin, 2012, p. 60). In the interview process, teachers were able to begin to reflect and use language to give meaning to this metaphor, and their potential identities within the metaphor.
Once teachers can express and perhaps share a common understanding of symbols integral to teaching, successful interaction is more likely to happen.

**Theme Two: Thinking and Self.** Thinking about and discussing personal issues, such as identity, and self, was a stretch for teachers. Symbolic interactionists believe that we are not born with a sense of self—we can only experience ourselves in relation to others. Because people are “thinking beings,” Blumer (1969) believed that their meanings can be modified during interaction through interpretive processes, during which an individual communicates with him/herself. During this process people have the ability to think about things and interpret them (modify or alter the meanings or symbols), rather than simply reacting instinctually. Most participants struggled to articulate their meaning of “teacher identity.” For example, once P1 determined her meaning of “identity” as “how students see me,” her response was “approachable, calm, or humorous.” Others, who felt identity meant, “who I am at school,” responded with “a professional” or “a team member.” Once P4 described his understanding of students as “good kids,” “here for the learning,” his resulting interactions with them were reported as “more of a partnership,” “fun,” and “engaging.

**“I” and “Me.”** Blumer (1969) identified the self as an ongoing process combining the subjective “I” (how I see myself) and the objective, social “me” (how I imagine others see me). Griffin (2012) describes this concept well, summarizing Mead (1934): “We paint our self-portrait with brush strokes that come from taking the role of the other—imagining how we look to another person” (p. 59). As teachers reflected on their identity it was interesting to note the ongoing conversation between “I” and “me” as what Blumer (1969) calls “self-indications.” (Note: These self-indications are usually
played out in the person’s mind). Sachs (2005) reminds us that teacher professional identity, or an understanding of self, provides the framework for teachers to construct personal ideas of how to be, how to act, and how to understand their work and their place in society. Instead of being fixed or imposed, identity is negotiated through experience and making sense of that experience (as cited in Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p. 178).

In the interviews teachers “saw” themselves in a variety of roles (role-taking), including teacher as: facilitator, coach/helper, communicator, collaborator, designer/planner, model learner—even as a textbook. In her reflection, P7 recognized her objective self as “part of a team that is very professional,” “honored to be a staff person” at this “highly regarded” school, and “identity before students” (as “their advocate”). Others also defined their identity as (P1) “how students see me,” or (P7) “my identity before students,” while some generalized that identity came from (P2) “all of my life experiences,” or (P4) “who I am as a whole person.” Teachers indicated that they see themselves in the reactions of their students and try to make adjustments accordingly. P1 described this in her team teaching experience, whereby she saw herself (and was held accountable for her “self”) via interactions with both her students and her colleague in the classroom. Overall, interview conversations gave teachers the role-taking experience, and the resulting personal reflection was valuable for teachers’ professional growth.

When individuals are able to view themselves from the standpoint of the *generalized other*—the mental image based on expectations and responses from others and society—self consciousness is raised. In these challenging times, Alger (2009) found that teachers often do not teach as they would like to—and as such they identified different metaphors for their current practice, compared to what they would aspire to.
Obstacles to achieving desired metaphors included students, curriculum, home and community, curriculum, lack of resources, and administration (p. 749). Teachers in this study noted the challenges of taking on a new role that is not commonly accepted in society as a lack of common understanding, necessary commitment and passion, going too fast, and technology. Blumer (1969) presents role-conflicts as situations in which there are conflicting expectations about a specified role, including the “I,” the “me,” or the “generalized other.” P4 noted this cultural discrepancy: “[Teachers here are] more focused on learner outcomes—not just how quiet things are.” Akkerman and Meijer’s (2011) dialogical approach to identity acknowledges that the continuity (of professional identity) is implicitly maintained by “routinized personal behavior as well as cultural and historical mediation” (p. 313). Blumer (1969) suggests social organization (including the structural features of culture, social systems, social stratification, or social roles) “shapes situations in which people act,” and “supplies fixed sets of symbols which people use in interpreting their situations” (87-88). Acceptance of this new role by all concerned players, including students, parents, and larger society, remains to be seen. It is noted the opportunity exists to uncover and challenge existing teacher beliefs and practices that both limit emancipation in schools and potential teacher agency. Kelchtermans (2009) suggests a valuable component of teacher self-understanding includes a “future perspective,” which reveals a teacher’s expectations about his/her future in their job. This confirms the “ongoing interactive process of sense-making and construction,” and how “one’s actions in the present are influenced by meaningful experiences in the past and expectations for the future” (p. 263). Part of this future perspective includes a recognition of technology as a 21st century tool, and several teachers expressed a concern
that it will replace existing face-to-face communication practices, and the “heart” of teaching—thus replacing or challenging current, comfortable concepts of self as teachers.

**Theme Three: Performance.** Most teachers felt that they “performed” in their current teaching roles, although some identified performance as negative and unauthentic. When asked about performance and performing in the classroom, some teachers proudly shared how they performed for students, while others seemingly apologized if they felt their teaching practices resembled performance at all. According to Pineau (1994) it might be that “performance reframes the whole educational enterprise as a mutable and ongoing ensemble of narratives and performances, rather than a linear accumulation of isolated, discipline-specific competencies” (p. 10).

In the dramaturgical sense, meaning emerges in a similar way as in symbolic interactionism, out of a behavioral consensus between human beings (Mead, 1934). Specifically, Goffman’s metaphor of social interaction as a *dramaturgical performance* (self as performance) allows a view on how teachers, as actors, negotiate their identity publicly in their interactions with others via social settings, appearance, and manners of interacting. Although Goffman stresses that performance happens in everyday life, the connotations of the words (performance, performing) made some teachers very nervous, and they did not want to be seen as (P2) “unauthentic” in their performances of themselves. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) states:

> When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess,
that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be. (p. 17)

Goffman (1959) concludes by highlighting the two extremes: those who are taken in by their own act and those who are cynical about it (p. 19). Goffman’s scenario speaks volumes to the professional images that teachers feel they must present each day, in their schools, and in their communities. P3 described his performance in front of a group as, “exhausting but effective…an intense experience,” which uses “emphasis and humor” in an “engaging way to bring the audience into the learning.” He also identified the other side of performing as “personal contact,” “one-on-one conferences” that are very focused on individual needs. He identified that the chance to “sit down and talk about ‘your’ ideas,” between two people as “powerful.” He mentioned that the collaboration and interdisciplinary work was great (front stage), but (behind the scenes) it was “work, work, work” (backstage).

P1 discussed her team-teaching roles as performances, and identified herself in these situations as “silly,” and “not-so-serious,” able to “play off each other” and tell stories and jokes in class. She used the terms “battle right back,” “an act,” and “not rehearsed” to describe the interactions with her team-teaching colleague, and suggested that “kids are entertained” by such performances, which bring energy and enthusiasm to the lesson. She indicated that at times she thinks it is “weird to have [the other teacher] in here, with me talking,” but adds that it brings accountability and the opportunity for creative thought through brainstorming while being in the process. Conquergood (1989) talks about the “playful nature of performance,” which is “linked to improvisation, innovation, experimentation, frame, reflection, agitation, irony, parody, jest, clowning
and carnival” (p. 83). Goffman refers to this as *facework* and *impression management*, which are integral components of teacher image, and perhaps part of the reason that many teachers are uncomfortable in roles where they feel exposed, such as team-teaching. P1 indicated that in team teaching experiences, when personalities and classroom management practices “click” there is a better chance of success. Shared meaning enables the success of the performance. Impression management includes “talking the teacher talk,” such as espousing “teamwork,” “collaboration,” and “practicing my pedagogy,” to control others’ perceptions of a professional image. Teachers, as performers, “may even attempt to give the impression that their present poise and proficiency are something they have always had and that they have never had to fumble their way through a learning period” (Goffman, 1959, p. 47). If, according to culture, (P4) “students [still] have expectations of how a teacher will behave,” yet (P1) “there is not as much classroom [learning]” and “students can come back tomorrow and be smarter than me,” then teachers’ impression management might take on a whole new meaning in changing times. Symbolic interactionists remind us that we involved in a constant negotiation with others to publicly define our identity and the nature of the situation. We create reality.

**Importance of Setting.** Teachers stressed the importance of the setting in their performances (as teachers). The environment and culture of the school emerged as integral to perceived success in implementing transformational teaching practices. The “palace” (teachers term for the newly built school) seemed to set the stage for more transformational teaching performances from the actors. In this setting teachers felt empowered and supported; able to create change; focus on relationships; and build
rapport and trust with students and colleagues. P7 offered another view: “Good learning is still students and teachers. Four walls. The success of the learner does not depend on how many smart boards [you have].” Teachers also identified the setting as one that is “less teacher-directed,” “more project-based,” and “interdisciplinary.” But Pineau (1994) warns, “the collaborative nature of performance blurs the boundaries between teachers and students” (p. 21), which can potentially cause role conflict and frustration for teachers as they take on new roles. Goffman (1959) presents idealization as situations when an individual presents himself before others, and his performance tends to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole” (p. 35). But the transition from “sage on the stage” is still difficult, at least for society, even though teachers might say otherwise: P1: “I’m not that special…[learners] really don’t need me…a teacher is not the main source [of knowledge anymore].

Implications

Based on the findings, several implications can be made relating to the importance of school culture, the effect of technology on identity, shared conversations on teacher identity, and future teacher identities.

Importance of culture. The importance of school environment and culture emerged as a significant factor in terms of teachers’ ability to perform this new identity of architect of learning. This includes not only the physical environment, but focuses on “feeling” that the people have when they are there. In their conversations, teachers overwhelmingly championed a practice of relationships over curriculum. They advocated a belief in a student-first culture and recognize that “the way we do school,” is
changing. These practices and attitudes may have been influenced by a strong professional development culture for teachers in the school, and in particular, for the participants in the study. Kinney, Brown-Rosier, & Harger (2003) agree: “The school environment is characterized by social interaction and symbolic communication between teachers and students and among peers that have significant implications for how children and youths approach schooling” (as cited in Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003, p. 583). P3 positively described his school as “not the high school class [school] you attended!” If (like the teachers in this study) teachers see school (“symbol”) as a place where they are empowered to make change (“meaning”), their actions will follow. This school culture is indicative of a larger cultural change that must be led by its participants. Hewitt and Shulman (2011) present studies by a group of symbolic interactionists who agree:

We humans are born into an already existing society and culture, and we are quickly swept into its flow. We are surrounded by others who define reality for us, showing us the objects in their world and in some ways requiring us to make them our own...[We] human beings however do not have to reproduce the society and culture that we inherit, and sometimes we do not. Rather, as Herbert Blumer said, society consists of people interacting with one another. Culture is not an invariant set of lessons from the past but an environment in which we all live, an environment composed of objects whose persistence depends on our continuing to take them into account, even as our survival depends on coming to terms with them. (pp. 28-29)

**Effect of Technology on 21st Century Identity.** Although some teachers identified technology as a necessary tool for learning, and the related technological skills
as essential in the new teacher identity, others expressed concern that it threatens the traditional face-to-face communication practices and relationships in schools, and is perhaps a just a learning trend. Heick (2013) argues that technology, as a “permanent disruptor,” is here to stay. He argues that “students have already changed,” and that the danger lies in continuing to pair “connected students with disconnected learning environments. He suggests “abandoning the pursuit of a "best way" to educate -- whether it's a "program," a scripted curriculum, or even a set of preferred instructional strategies -- in favor of a mosaic of pedagogical and heutagological approaches to learning that begin with the student, and work backward from there” (Technology as a Permanent Disruptor, para. 6). In this new age of knowledge many teachers face a love-hate battle with technology as the “symbol” of their potential loss of power and control of knowledge and learning. As such, how teachers “think” about technology, and the “meaning” that teachers give it will affect their ability to effectively perform new roles that are technologically driven.

**Shared conversations on teacher identity.** Kelchtermans (2009) suggests teacher professional identity manifests itself in *how teachers see themselves as teachers* based on their interpretations of their continuing interactions with their context. Symbolic interactionists assert that a *significant symbol* is a word or gesture that has a common meaning to individuals and others. The traditionally held meaning of “teacher” might be in question for this new role as *architect of learning.* It is not clear whether teachers commonly use metaphors to give meaning to their roles, but a shared discussion about the meaning of this new metaphor could unite teachers in a common direction, not only in terms of how teachers will perform it, but how learners and greater society will
interpret and accept it. The symbolic interactionist perspective recognizes the shifting, flexible manner in which we use symbols, while at the same time acknowledging the influence of societal norms and practices. Teachers have identified an overpowering culture of “more” in their dialogue, with demands for: more technology, more focus, more collaboration, more personalization, more communication, more equality, more interactivity/hands on, more flexibility, and more learning with students. P3 summarized student and societal expectations aptly as: “you will make time with me.” The symbolic interactionist lens reveals that the conversation begins with teachers but requires the interpretation of all audiences; students and parents will need to partner in this process. In taking the role of the other and seeing ourselves from others’ perspectives, our responses come to be like others’ responses, and the meaning of the self becomes a shared meaning. There is a need for conversation characterized by new thinking about new roles and performances designed for and accepted by teachers. P3 articulates this need:

*There is a need to cut through the noise—students live in busy/loud worlds...we need to find a medium that encourages students to participate in communicating, in class, one-on-one, via technology. [Students need to] be a partner in that—it’s not just one-way. The challenge in communicating is that it’s not more noise in their lives—we as adults need to find this. We have to get through to make this matter.*

**Future Teacher Identities.** Symbolic interactionists believe that meaning is created in the language that people use. Over the past decade there has been a growing interest in “pinning down” a 21st century teacher identity so that teachers can “perform”
this role, and learners (and greater society) will benefit. Symbolic interactionists remind us that we “live in a named world,” and that naming is how we make sense of that world. People have the capacity to think of new ways to act by inventing new objects—new names... Faced with novel situations or obstacles to conduct under way, human beings think of alternative goals and alternative methods. Thus, the meanings that inform how we act are never fixed or final, but emerge and change as we go about our affairs. These meanings—the objects of our actions—are personal as well as social, for human beings easily learn to pursue goals that are inimical to the goals that others pursue. (Hewitt & Shulman, 2011, p.27)

In Alberta, the 21st century high school teacher identity is named: an architect of learning. Professional metaphors are useful to identify the attitudes, behaviors, and skills that are necessary to perform a role successfully. Johnson (2006) suggests metaphors help show us our assumptions and priorities. If, as Blumer (1969) believes, human response is based on meaning, a discussion of what meaning teachers might make of the metaphor is significant for further teacher professional development and teacher training.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that need to be addressed. First, although qualitative data collected in interviews and observations are considered rich and holistic, with “strong potential for revealing complexities” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013, p. 11), it has the potential to be conceived of as dialogical, and such dialogical situations require an “awareness of the effect of the researcher on how the teacher presents him or herself” (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 316). Thus, I am aware of the influence that my own subjectivity may have had during both the interviews and observation processes. The reality that teachers may have responded by anticipating what the researcher was looking for (response bias) is echoed by MacKinnon (2005), who provides a caution for interpreting such research: “Do interviewees tell you what you want to hear or can you create a trust that allows the researcher to get past the socially constructed symbols and analyse the true feelings of participants?” (p. 101).

A second limitation was the amount of time available for the research study, which 1) did not allow for a more focused, longitudinal study of the participants, 2) did not allow for more observation times to support the interview data, 3) did not allow for more than one “case” study, and 4) did not allow for a research strategy focused on continued dialogue to involve teachers in the analysis and interpretation of the research findings. These allowances may have increased the trustworthiness of the research. As such some caution must be taken in “characterizing” teachers based on the findings of limited research. These limitations were tempered by the research preparation and the research process itself. Prior professional relationships allowed for immediate support of
my research: including guidance and/or support from The Honorable Jeff Johnson, Alberta’s Minister of Education; Dr. Sharon Friesen, University of Calgary professor and key researcher in 21st century education in Alberta; Kurt Sacher, the Superintendent in the school division; and Tom Christensen, principal of the school. Because trust existed from the onset of the study I was permitted “free range” throughout the school for observation purposes. It is noted that Olds High School is recognized as an ILE—Innovative Learning Environment, and as a “model school” within Alberta, is not considered as yet to be typical of the learning practices within the province. It is recognized that a primary limitation of this study is that the participants in this study might not be considered a true representative sample, that is, representative of all teachers in Alberta (or elsewhere), due to fact that both the school and the participants were recommended as a result of progressive teaching practices.

**Recommendations for Future Study**

This study makes an important contribution to the current field of research by (1) recognizing current teacher perceptions of identity and how they are performed from the symbolic interactionist perspective; (2) recognizing teacher perceptions of a 21st century teaching role, and how it might be performed; and (3) highlighting the importance of engaging teachers in a focused conversation about understanding their new roles in the 21st century. Future study should focus on several things. First, studies incorporating multiple cases might offer a more extensive range of Alberta’s teachers’ interpretations of the new metaphor *architect of learning*, and allow for a more complete picture of how teachers envision this new role. If this identity is to be authentic and realistic, teachers should have a voice in interpreting its meaning; it cannot be assumed that teachers will
“fall into” these roles with ease, as is often expected of teachers. Second, an *architect of learning* is a major transformation in terms of how teachers see themselves, students and the delivery of education. This metaphorical role is a significant part of the vision for education to 2030 in Alberta, and, if teachers are to fully succeed in performing new roles, future studies might address how teachers can be included as equal partners in future educational policy discourse. Third, further study should continue to engage teachers in an awareness of how they use communication and performance in their professional roles and in the establishment of their identities. An extensive case study or studies (perhaps over time), or an ethnographic study might provide better opportunity to observe teachers in their existing roles and focus on changing communication practices. Finally, future study should consider the significance of school environment and culture on teacher identity and the ability to enact 21st century teaching practices.

**Conclusions**

Kelchtermans (2009) argues that throughout their careers teachers develop a *personal interpretative framework* that functions as a lens through which they see their job, give meaning to it, and act in it (pp. 260-261). Blumer’s symbolic interactionism theory and Goffman’s dramaturgical performance provide lenses to enhance our understanding of how teachers might interpret and perform the metaphor *architect of learning*, by focusing on the *meaning, language, and thinking* that teacher, students, and society create in their interactions with each other. As technology settles in to dominate the learning experience, the traditional role of the teacher is being flipped on its head. Change is not new to teachers; they “are used to hearing about new ideas in education—changes in instruction, technology and curriculum that are going to fix what's broken”
(Heick, 2013). Critical theory strives to fix what is broken or flawed. These shifts are an indication of how education, as a “living practice,” must be alert to changing times (Friesen, 2009, p. 2).

The concept architect of learning is part of Alberta’s long-term vision for education, which demands a critical change from a broken system to one that is learner-centered and competency-based—one that recognizes the importance of the teacher as “the single most important contributor to learner success,” and the role of technology as a powerful tool” to be “harnessed in support of learners’ innovation and discovery” (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 7). The idea behind this metaphor is most likely informed directly or indirectly by critical theoretic educational philosophies, which value learning as a “reciprocal practice” that “can no longer be understood as a one-way exchange where ‘we [teachers] teach, they [students] learn’” (Friesen, 2009, p. 6). In this study, underlying critical theory challenged teachers to reflect on how existing identities have been shaped in particular ways and to consider possibilities for thinking about the aspects comprising them differently (Clarke, 2009, p. 194). Overall, teachers did not present a common understanding of the new role of architect of learning, although they often used common language to reflect on current and future teacher identities. Some teachers saw the new role as better suited for the student, than the teacher. Because this new role has been identified (in literature) as integral to Alberta’s educational vision, it is expected that teachers who do not “buy in” may experience a sense of internal or external struggle with the new role. This shift to a new identity may also cause a backlash from traditional society, as it challenges dominant ideologies or expectations of teachers as owners of the
knowledge. Rather than: “Are teachers ready for this shift?” it might be: “Is society ready for this shift?”

As teachers change they are tasked to develop a fundamental awareness of more than changing curriculum, technological know-how, and the latest pilot project. They require an essential awareness of how they use (or might use) language and performance to reinforce current and new identities. To unleash the potential of this metaphor, teachers must be allowed to take responsibility for this new identity, “unpack” it, and determine how they might best perform it. “The classroom is a complex world; a stage of many actors, genres, and competing forces. Life on this stage is never resting, but always in movement” (Pettersson et al., 2004, p. 604). Given these conclusions, it seems obvious to promote the practice of reflection, which moves beyond teacher actions to “uncover underlying beliefs, ideas, knowledge and goals” (Ketchtermans, 2009, p. 269) in order to think critically from a “future perspective” (p. 263) and consider new teaching roles for new times.
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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. Describe the culture at this school.

2. How do you typically talk to students?

3. Describe what makes up your identity as a teacher.

4. Has your identity changed since you began teaching? If so, how so?

5. How do you use communication, such as language and performance to reinforce your identity as a teacher? What does this look like? Sound like?

6. Based on your knowledge/experience, do teachers at this school communicate differently than teachers at other schools?

7. How have teacher communication practices/strategies changed:
   a) Since you (teacher) were a high school student?
   b) Since you began teaching?
   c) In the last few years at this school?

8. Are there certain characteristics/skills that 21st century teachers have, or will need to have?

9. How do (will) 21st century teachers communicate differently?

10. What is an architect of learning? What communication practices might you associate with yourself as an architect of learning?

11. What do you perceive to be the challenges of the metaphor architect of learning?

   Because teachers were mostly unfamiliar with the architect of learning concept, I offered two options when posing this question: an academic preamble to decipher the term before posing the question and/or adjusting the question so that teachers could
grasp the concept and provide clear responses (e.g. What communication practices might you associate with a teacher as an architect or planner of learning?).