Uncovering Cover Stories: Tensions and Entailments in the Development of Teacher Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Building on the research of Crites in theology and Clandinin and Connelly in education, the authors map out three variations of cover stories lived and told by preservice and in-service teachers in order to clarify their scholarship and inform the research of others. We examine how these narratives are formed around canonical stories that teachers publicly claim to know (or show) and actually do know (but not as favored interpretations), and personally authorized stories that teachers publicly claim not to know (or show) but that they personally do know (as favored interpretations). We illustrate how this necessarily deceptive double storying may give rise to miseducative situations. We then offer our conceptualizations of knowledge communities and teachers’ narrative authority as ways to create spaces for all stories to be reflectively heard and examined, and to address inherent challenges that arise when narrative knowledge goes unacknowledged because of pervasive sacred stories embedded in institutional prescriptions, stories of school, and competing philosophical positions.

In our research programs over the past decade, we have passingly referred to cover stories (Crites, 1979) that were much more complicated and deeply embedded than we took time to explore. Because the idea of cover stories was not the direct focus of our narrative inquiries, we glossed over them as we pursued other areas of interest, one of which was an exploration of how our conceptualizations of the narrative authority of teachers and teachers’ knowledge communities fit together (Craig & Olson, 2002; Olson & Craig, 2001).

However, our research studies and practices with preservice and in-service teachers led us to see the importance of not merely appropriating...
cover stories as a useful and valuable term, but to understand the significance of investigating more fully the nature of cover stories, and explicitly mapping out some of their multidimensional/multilayered complexities as they related to teachers’ knowledge development in professional contexts. A reviewer’s suggestion that we further unpack how the idea of cover stories manifested itself in our research programs provided the impetus for us to address cover stories as a separate theme. From the outset, it is important that readers understand that our intent is not so much to typecast cover stories as it is to rein in our and others’ tendencies to use the conceptualization in a sweeping manner without giving it the careful consideration it deserves.

We begin by relating our interpretation of Crites’s notion of cover stories as they play out in educational contexts. Then, through the use of preservice and in-service teaching examples excerpted from our ongoing research programs, we investigate how and why the living and telling of cover stories develop. We examine how cover stories often inhibit or thwart the educative development of teachers’ knowledge and conclude by suggesting ways to create spaces for reflective inquiry into cover stories.

**NARRATIVE ROOTS**


Polkinghorne (1988) tells us that “at the individual level, people have a narrative of their own lives which enables them to construe what they are and where they are headed. At the cultural level, narratives also serve to give cohesion to shared beliefs and to transmit values” (p. 14). Yet these individual and cultural narratives are not as separate or simple as they might appear at first brush. The narrative tensions that we examine here occur in the convoluted interactions between individually and socially constructed narratives—what Ritchie and Wilson (2000) refer to as “the interplay of multiple and often conflicting narratives of professional and personal history” (p. 7). Cover stories, we believe, are constructed when incommensurable gaps or conflicts between individually and socially constructed narratives emerge.
THE PLACE OF COVER STORIES

Bruner (1986) describes the power of communally developed stories that appear to be given to us and that deeply shape individual lives and practices in this manner: “Stories define the range of canonical characters, the settings in which they operate, the actions that are permissible and comprehensible. And thereby they provide, so to speak, a map of possible roles and of possible worlds in which action, thought, and self-determination are permissible (or desirable)” (p. 66). These canonical, or “sacred stories” (Crites, 1971; Eisler, 1987), shape individuals’ horizons of knowing (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) by placing prescribed limits on what counts as authorized knowledge, what can be known, and how we come to know it. Ritchie and Wilson (2000) describe how these stories provide both constraint and comfort within educational settings: “A further source of power, in experienced teachers’ stories, is inherent in the socializing force of stories. Stories create a sense of belonging; teachers’ stories represent insider knowledge and insider membership” (p. 67). Thus, regardless of whether teachers personally approve of the communal story and whether it fits with the personal teaching narratives they are creating, compelling reasons exist to at least appear to be living the socially authorized story or stories.

At times, these canonical stories are introduced to teachers from outside their particular school contexts. Clandinin and Connelly (1995), for example, explained how prescribed stories take on the power of moral imperatives as they are poured down the conduit from out-of-classroom spaces to in-classroom spaces on school landscapes. At the same time, multiple stories are simultaneously played out within school contexts because teachers become authors of their own stories and characters in the stories created by others (MacIntyre, 1984). “Our life, it turns out, is not one story,” explains Randall (1995), “but many, a plethora of stories in fact, both stories within us and stories we are, in turn, within” (p. 185).

These multiple stories give rise to tensions and entailments that emerge at the intersections where teachers’ personal knowledge—constructed and reconstructed from experience—meets knowledge constructed by others, whether funneled into schools in the form of tasks and attributes, or constructed by others within their school contexts. As Randall (1995) further makes explicit, “Stories are not innocent. Indeed, variations in stories constitute one of the commonest sources of conflict in human affairs on all levels, from individuals in intimate relationships to entire societies. Every side in every conflict is telling a different story” (p. 107). When time or space is not available to publicly share and examine these diverse versions, “moral and ethical issues,” in Huber and Keats Whelan’s (2001) words, “become silenced by externally prescribed roles and responsibilities, predetermined scripts set within a seemingly necessary hierarchical order, with some members of the community holding power over others” (pp. 221–222;
Crites’s (1979) notion of cover stories is a helpful narrative lens to illuminate how some of the tensions and entailments that ensue are initiated and perpetuated rather than interrogated and discussed.

Crites introduced the notion of cover stories as one way to explain how individuals come to terms with contradictions between the stories they desire to author and the stories expected of them by others. Crites believes that this twisty predicament leads to a form of self-deception in which individuals, to varying degrees, live and tell particular narratives in order to fit in with the perceived canonical version of “how things should be.” In Crites’s (1979) words,

“two different renderings of experience can co-exist in a single consciousness [as a] double-storied type of self-deception. A person has two images or scenarios in mind, the one so unacceptable . . . that the other image or scenario is artfully fabricated in order to suppress it. The story that cannot be faced is the real story, in the sense that it continues to assert itself in motivating one’s course of action, with the more acceptable scenario constantly being put forward as a cover story to rationalize the course of action, however awkwardly it may be made to fit. The cover story, of course, must also offer a plausible rendering of the person’s action and experience, even though its plausibility may wear rather thin. One person’s cover story, in fact, may be another person’s real story, both its plausibility and its acceptability as a cover story being reinforced by the fact that others seem seriously to embrace it.” (p. 126)

Crites further unpacks the complexity:

“What makes it a cover story in a particular case is that it functions . . . as a secondary growth constantly called into play to counter and suppress the real story. We are justified in calling the latter the real story precisely because the cover story (or stories) must be steadily invoked in order to suppress it. The two co-existing stories do not simply stand side by side. The real story, though, never avowed, is the one that is actually believed and acted upon.” (p. 126)

Gilligan (1991) similarly alludes to cover stories in which girls are subtly persuaded to cover up their personal accounts of experience and to accept a story where knowing is disconnected from experience. She explains that “the wall that keeps memory from seeping through these covers may be the wall with the sign which labels body, feelings, relationships, knowing, voice and desire as bad” (p. 23). Stated differently, female ways of knowing become overtaken by more dominant male-authorized narratives (Randall, 1995) within which things valued by females may be considered irrelevant or bad. Here, ideas about what is important and unimportant, good and bad, become intricately connected in the cover story.

Through paying careful attention to the nested (Crites, 1979; Lyons, 1990) nature of cover stories, this article illustrates far-reaching implications for individuals and institutions. The conceptual frame we provide
specifically names variations of cover stories, lived and relived within the field of education, that emerge in our work. Our frame also shows how what teachers know becomes entangled with what they are “supposed to know.” Schön (1983) aptly invokes the iceberg metaphor to distinguish paradigmatic knowledge (Bruner, 1986)—representational knowledge abstracted from experience—from the part of the iceberg that is submerged (i.e., narrative knowledge—the storied reflections, based in and on action, that contribute to deep understandings of self, others, and educational practice). Our examples illuminate how cover stories are initiated and perpetuated by silence, compliance, moral imperatives, power structures, and subtly normalizing forces (Ritchie & Wilson, 2000) that ensure their continued acceptance as authorized versions of knowledge. We also discuss spaces, places, and conditions that enable cover stories to be heard and examined through the valuing of narrative authority (Olson, 1993, 1995) in knowledge communities (Craig, 1992, 1995).

**RESEARCH STORIES AS REFLECTIVE RETURNS IN AND ON EXPERIENCE**

Schön’s notion of a “reflective turn” (1991) is a critical concept that can help individuals recognize and name the sacred stories and cover stories that shape the contours of their professional experiences. We believe that our research participants engage in reflective turns in and on their experiences in their relationships with us. In a similar way, we reflectively turn as we review texts alone, and in relationship with one another and readers. In this way, we move back and forth between field texts and research texts, as each text/interpretation dialectically informs the other. The stories we share in conversation with our participants become shaped and reshaped as we each tell stories and give stories back. These narratives may originate with research participants or ourselves. Each telling offers a different lens through which to make sense of experience. Our overall purpose, however, is not to convey truth in a time-event correspondence way, as researchers in the historical tradition attempt to do (Spence, 1982); rather, our desire is to burrow into our research stories to seek out meanings that can, over time, lead to more informed understandings of restorying on our parts and on those of our participants. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explain, the intent is “not complete or full representation, but rather the selection of some aspect of—or angle on—reality that would transform [the] vision of the whole” (p. 5).

knowing that can assist in awakenings (Greene, 1995; Sacks, 1973) that enable teachers to uncover their taken-for-granted assumptions and move beyond prescribed versions of knowing in order to investigate more fully their tacit narrative knowing. Through reflectively returning to research texts from each of our research programs collected over time and across contexts, we engaged in a form of narrative metalevel analysis (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999: Craig, 2002; Czarniawka, 1997) in which we looked for common threads across individuals and situations to examine the living and telling of multiple versions and variations of cover stories. We highlight three examples present in our published work: (1) cover stories emanating from institutional prescription (Olson & Craig, 2001), (2) cover stories situated at the juncture between teachers’ stories and school stories (Craig & Olson, 2002), and (3) cover stories arising from conflicting philosophical stances concerning change (Craig, 2003). Though not intended to be exhaustive, these illustrations, when given more careful consideration, point to how and why cover stories are personally, communally, and institutionally created and lived. Following each example, we closely explore how and why the cover stories became interwoven in the particular teacher’s knowledge.

Example One: Cover Stories Emanating From Institutional Prescriptions

In the forthcoming story, we show tensions that emerged as Liz Clayton skillfully concealed her narrative knowing and lived a cover story associated with an institutionally sanctioned form of teacher professional development.

Liz: Differing Views of Professional Development

Liz Clayton, an experienced high school teacher in a mid-southern state, considered herself an accomplished “stand and deliver” teacher whose practice did not connect as fully as she would have liked with her students and their needs and interests. Acknowledging the tension between the way things were and the way she wanted them to be for her teaching practice, her students, her campus, and herself, she and a group of her colleagues wrote a school reform grant around teacher professional development and school size typically experienced by educators in comprehensive high schools:

What we asked for was time for teachers. We did not define it, we just said time to reflect and collaborate. . . . When we found out our school was awarded the grant, we had a crisis. . . . We had no specific plans of what we wanted to do with the money.
In the first year of funding, without a prescribed plan to follow, Liz’s school, in her opinion, floundered, coming dangerously close to “teacher revolt” because their approach lacked continuity. In Liz’s words, their reform had become a “flavor of the month” variety in which activities “did not have anything to do with what happened before”—an ironic mirroring of the systemwide form of professional development to which they had become accustomed. The cover story they had learned to live—the one of doing what others required—had apparently obliterated awareness of their personal and professional needs. By the end of the first year, the school’s reform plan resembled a patchwork quilt with no common threads binding the elements and people together.

Then a team of educators from the high school, in the company of their principal and assistant principal in charge of curriculum, experienced “a real epiphany” at a summer institute sponsored by the reform movement and other agencies. The team engaged in a professional development activity where they connected their school mission with the imperatives of the reform movement and with their personal beliefs and practices as teachers. In other words, the team of educators experienced a professional development approach that took into account individual teachers’ narrative knowing as the starting point for addressing the reform movement’s imperatives. Liz described the process this way:

We took our mission statement and we said, okay, what current programs go under each element of the mission statement, and can we reflect, collaborate, and come up with an espoused theory that will unify everything. . . . And it was just like a light bulb. For the very first time, we saw . . . we were going some place, things fit together.

The task of clarifying teachers’ narrative knowing in which Liz’s team engaged helped the school to organize and focus their effort, as the passage below indicates:

Our principal’s view is that school reform should be very teacher-driven. He wants reform from the bottom up. . . . But no one stepped up and took charge. . . . We teachers had a muddled vision, and we had never had time nor had been challenged to articulate what we were doing. That summer institute gave us the challenge and the time to focus, to sit down, to reflect, to collaborate, to say, “This is what we are doing.”

Liz and her colleagues then returned to their 2,400-student campus and engaged in a similar approach to professional development with the school’s remaining 130 faculty members. She discussed how events unfolded in her school context: “[R]ight before school started we had a three-day summer institute. We teachers were responsible for the whole thing. Our principal completely stepped out. We developed it and it was one of the most emotional things I have ever participated in.” She went on to explain the extent to which the alternate approach to professional devel-
development resonated with the personal and collective narrative knowing of her peers: “Everybody kept saying, ‘I never knew teachers could be so supportive of one another. I never understood where we were going.’ But we physically acted out what we were doing. We were the pieces.” It took a great deal of thought.

Liz, the other planning team members, and the other teachers who saw the value in the approach (which acknowledged narrative knowing as foundational to personal professional development) experienced it as engaging, knowledge generating, and knowledge unifying. In short, it formed a sharp contrast to the normalizing cover story that they had come to accept through professional development sessions offered by the school district. In these sessions, everyone was expected to receive the same knowledge prescribed by others in a one-size-fits-all form of delivery.

Ironically, the day after the teacher-authored, reform-sponsored version of professional development, a district in-service training session, otherwise known as a staff development day, was held. The enormous contrast between the two approaches to professional development stood out in Liz’s mind: “But what happened the next day was district in-service, which is scripted, you know. They give you this and you will say: ‘Blank, blank, blank . . . ’ Everybody does the same thing.”

On this particular day, teachers of all grades were expected to use the same strategies to improve test scores. Liz explained her district’s rationale as she had come to understand and tell it as a female. Her depersonalized use of language suggested a story given to her by others: “The district believes there are strategies that if everyone used, and if everybody bought into, that the [state] scores would move up. They are standard strategies . . . from pre-K to 12th grade calculus.”

In the middle of one session, Liz’s colleague, a beginning teacher, posed a question: “What is the point of this? I do not understand. . . . ” The query prompted Liz to reflect on “the point” of district in-service as she had come to know it. She silently responded to his voiced wonder in the following manner: “Do not get me wrong, young one. . . . I love district in-service because I get a chance to see friends from other schools. . . . We talk and have a good time . . . but we realize it is pointless.”

As a veteran teacher, Liz had learned to live the district approach to professional development as a social and institutional ritual, an engrained cover story that she had learned so thoroughly to call her own that she was unable to publicly question or comment on it. Through many experiences lived over time, Liz paradoxically had formed a paradigmatic version of how professional development worked because this cover story was continually confirmed for and by her. This version in turn allowed her to enact an associated “good girl” story that also was expected of her. However, this telling neither contributed to the growth of her students nor to her development as a teacher. In the meantime, she had experienced a model of teacher enhancement that supported her teaching practices and her
growth in a community of peers, and affirmed her female ways of knowing. Even though she knew the value of this alternate model as an individual educator, she was not institutionally authorized to acknowledge its promise or to advocate for it without possibly endangered her position in the school context. The ripples she could create would bear consequences—for her teaching practice, for her child who was a student enrolled in the district, and potentially for future employment. Being publicly branded a female troublemaker—“a pot stirrer,” in her words—was not a desirable plot line for a female in her or any other school district. Here, Liz’s concern resonates with Randall’s (1995) apt observation that “when we re-story . . . we step out of line. We [necessarily] undermine the authority of the script in which we have previously played our part, and we challenge the integrity of our fellow characters” (p. 254). For these reasons, Liz Clayton chose to live a cover story in which, following Crites, two different renderings of experiences coexisted in her consciousness.

Reflective Turn on Cover Stories Emanating From Institutional Prescriptions

Authorized versions of professional knowledge such as the one Liz experienced at the district staff development day typically present prospective and practicing teachers with prenarrated—and hence, prescribed—canonical texts to learn and teach by. Such approaches appear on school landscapes, not as topics for inquiry, but as imperatives—like the testing mandate resident in Liz’s narrative—demanding specific actions within a particular time frame or context. When officially authorized versions of professional knowledge and practice are presented as givens, the narrative knowledge of individuals such as Liz or her beginning teacher colleague tends to go underground, and the secondary growth—the cover story—takes precedence. Ironically, the choices that teachers and preservice teachers make and the actions that they take necessarily come from their individual narrative knowledge. However, the “real” story becomes diminished to the point where individuals lose awareness of their personal agency in authoring these stories to live by. Crites (1979) explains this bedeviling double-storied paradox in this way: “If personal agency is being subverted, it is being subverted by personal agency itself [with] personal consciousness being set at cross purposes within itself . . .” (p. 118). Ritchie and Wilson (2000) echo Crites’s explanation: “The stories experienced teachers tell often reflect their own colonization by the narratives of schooling and their misrecognition of themselves in the ideologies of education. They construct stories that erase their own authority” (p. 66).

In this highly complex manner, Liz becomes narratively restrained (as opposed to constrained) by the institutional narratives within which her professional life takes shape. This results in her knowing, participating, and
valuing the rich professional development alternative and dutifully attending required “training” sessions—if only to socialize with other teachers. Liz’s learned denial of how she, her colleagues, and her students would benefit most from professional development becomes a legitimate form of knowledge construction and reconstruction for a teacher who wishes to maintain employment. In this double-edged compromise, valuable changes to individual practice and to the professional knowledge landscapes of schools become thwarted as hierarchies of power and position ensure the continued acceptance of homogeneously authorized versions of knowledge concerning what is best for students and teachers.

Example Two: Cover Stories Situated at the Juncture of Teachers’ Stories and School Stories

In this second story, we examine how Pat MacIntyre, a preservice teacher, became aware of and learned to live and tell cover stories that were shaped by school stories that she encountered in different school contexts.

*Pat—Two Levels of Truth*

As a student and mother of a school-aged son, Pat entered her bachelor of education program with many stories embedded in her narrative knowing of schools. Her previous work in a day-care center left her feeling comfortable working with young children, and her experience with and love of art led her to see the world “three-dimensionally.” During her practicum, Pat learned that just as there were acceptable stories of practice that needed to be negotiated in the classroom, there were acceptable stories that needed to be mediated within diverse school contexts.

One of the stories that Pat had previously constructed as a parent and a school volunteer was of John, the principal of her son’s school. In preparation for school amalgamations, John was the principal of Pat’s son’s school while simultaneously becoming the new principal of the school in which Pat was completing her practicum. Pat explained, “He’s half time at two schools. This is his first year at the school where I teach.” Pat looked forward to working with John, whom she knew as a parent and parent volunteer in the school. She described her narrative knowing of John in the following way:

The principal gets a lot of things done in a short period of time. Because he’s not afraid to ask. It’s a gift actually. He gets a lot of things for the school by asking people. He knows people’s strengths, and he says, “Would you mind?” And I consider that a strength. Especially coming from the other school as a parent. Seeing all the things that the other school has. Because he has been willing to sort of step out there and ask people to help.
Pat, however, discovered a very different story of John being constructed by the teachers in her practicum setting, the new school to which John had been appointed.

Even though they’re very pleasant and cooperative with him when he’s there, there’s a serious amount of grumbling and a lot of rolling of eyes and that kind of thing. I really don’t like two-facedness. And I thought, in a school situation, they’re just protecting themselves—everybody knows how to make things run smoothly. But the reality is they’re not communicating the reality of how they feel. They would complain about choices the principal made. And, “Well, you know, he’s just really principal of [the other school], and he’s just duplicating everything in our school.” They would never communicate that to him. And so there really seemed to be two levels of truth. And so then I thought, you really have to watch who you align yourself with. There’s real politics happening in the schools. And there was a tension.

When Pat learned that her narrative knowing of John was not the story being constructed by the teachers in her practicum school, she began to reexamine her own narrative knowing of John, teachers in general, and herself in relation to the teachers with whom she worked. Pat began to reassess her previous story of John as a principal “who everybody adores. Or at least in my understanding everybody adores him. The tension among the staff doesn’t seem to be there [at the other school].” Pat was also aware that this “might be a quick assumption on [her] part” because she knew him as a parent, not as a teacher. At the same time, she found the differences between the story the teachers were constructing of John when he was absent and the cover story they communally lived when John was present “really frustrating.” Thus, Pat found herself in a position where her “real” story of John was the other teachers’ cover story. Pat resisted the teachers’ “real” story of John, but at the same time, she felt publicly unable to tell her real story of John because of the vulnerability she experienced as a preservice teacher. However, this tension led Pat to lead a variety of other cover stories as she learned to become cautious and guarded in her responses and questions in her school milieu: “And I just thought, ‘Boy, you really have to be careful.’ Because what they were doing was being safe, keeping things smooth. But they weren’t being honest. And so it also changed how I was. I wasn’t as free. I found that it heightened everything up.”

Although Pat attempted to steer clear of the wider school story of John, she soon found herself inextricably trapped in the middle. The situation innocently arose when John, aware of Pat’s strengths in art, inquired about whether she would be interested in starting an art club.

I thought it was a great opportunity for me. Because it wouldn’t look bad on a resume to say that I ran this art club. And also I had this art club with the grade fours, fives, and sixes, in a really kind of a selfish way. I don’t have a lot of experience working with that age group. I feel much more comfortable with the younger
grade. Having this art club was a chance for me to work with these kids every day, but on my turf. Like, on my terms. And I really learned so much. And I am much more comfortable with that age group. And so I think it was a really positive experience. And the kids that came were just so delighted. They were just craving creative experience.

At the same time, Pat found herself a central character lodged between the teachers’ “real” story of John, her own attempt to cover over her story of him with the teachers, and her personal desire to run the art club:

The staff just . . . like, rallied and just, you know, this is so unfair that he’s using you. And all of a sudden I got in the middle of it. And I didn’t mean to. Especially this one staff person in particular, cornered me one day on the way to the photocopier. Boy, did she lay into me about how I shouldn’t let the principal take advantage of me. So I found that was really very difficult. But, it’s just that they haven’t experienced him doing that before. Like, he gets things done by asking people. So, there was such a tension.

When Pat felt restrained and silenced in the school context, she tried to make some sense of the stories she experienced and imagine ways to live out the multistoried existence through discussions with other preservice teachers who had become part of her knowledge communities in the university setting. She also continued to try to figure out these complexities in her research relationship.

Reflective Turn on Cover Stories Situated at the Juncture of Teachers’ Stories and School Stories

“That selves and professional identities change is certain, but teacher identity needs to be understood in relationship to living a life and forming and seeking to maintain a self within shifting contexts” (Bullough & Baughman, 1997, p. 95). During her practicum, Pat felt expected to conform to a newly developed school story of John, the principal, in one context, even though she knew a very different school story and personal story based on her narrative knowing arising from her experiences in a different school context. Yet, she learns that she needs to cover her knowing and her questions with a veil of pleasant congeniality. Some might wonder why Pat felt compelled to live cover stories rather than to just speak up. We turn to some possible explanations.

Pat found a pleasant superficiality prevailing in which it seemed like everyone had come to a tacit agreement about the parameters of what would be discussed and with whom in her practicum school context. Barth (1991), in his exploration of possibilities and constraints for improving schools from within, sheds light on felt tensions between collegiality and congeniality. Congeniality becomes an important way for teachers to
smooth over differences and live together in complex, contradictory, tension-filled school landscapes. As Ritchie and Wilson (2000) point out, the need to belong and to be an insider often requires participating in the school stories being constructed in response to stories given to schools (Connelly & Clandinin, 1996)—at least on the surface. At the same time, this smoothing cover story of congeniality disenables teachers from grappling with important issues in a collegial way. Pat keenly understood the congeniality that would be necessary for the teachers to manage the transition of what she termed “the loss” of their former principal. Pat also was acutely aware that as a student teacher, she was not an ongoing part of the stories that had been constructed and reconstructed over time in this particular school context. Thus, she learned that she needed to be respectful of the stories she encountered, and cautious of the stories she chose to live and tell in the midst of collective stories lived and told in her practicum environment. Pat’s frustration with the two levels of truth is mirrored in Huber and Keat Whelan’s (2001) work, in which they liken the “still pond” metaphor pervasive in schools with “everyone in their place, everything running smoothly” (p. 222). Following Greene (1994), they emphasized that the disruption of this smoothness—this cover story—is critical for personal and professional growth. Yet, as Ritchie and Wilson (2000) cautioned, “We realized that preservice teachers often lacked a space in which to challenge and scrutinize more experienced teachers’ stories and the assumptions behind them. Without this opportunity to examine and challenge the conservative narratives of schools, preservice teachers’ authority to articulate alternative narratives was often severely undermined” (p. 67).

Although Pat did have knowledge communities with her peers and in her research relationship, the lack of space within the school to publicly examine the stories being constructed led her to continue to live cover stories in the school context even though she was trying to make sense of them in other contexts.

Example Three: Cover Stories Emanating From Dueling Views of Change

In this third story, we feature individual and collective cover stories lodged within conflicting views of human agency and discuss how changes take place in the reform plot lines given to schools.

Missy Ibarra: Dueling Stories of Reform

Missy Ibarra was an accomplished teacher nearing the end of her teaching career in a school in a mid-southern state. The campus where she taught had had two reform initiatives simultaneously introduced: one centering
on science education reform, and the other focused on whole school reform. Because Missy was a science teacher, she was intimately aware of and involved in both. Here is the preliminary narrative sense she began to make of her situation:

Missy: The industry curriculum project should be completely separate from the national reform initiative. The national program is not science-oriented; it is whole-school reform oriented. The industry program is based in science, and everybody else is supposed to tag along, ride with us.

Researcher: Hmmmm . . .

Missy: We are supposed to be writing science-based curriculum that includes other disciplines in it . . . And that has nothing to do with what the national program is talking about. That program has a whole different slant. And the industry project [uses] school resources . . . [that] are supposed to be used in a much larger way, I think.

As can be seen, Missy supposed that the two reform projects could be lived separately in her context—and by implication, in her knowing. However, she inevitably combined how she experienced both reform initiatives influencing her school milieu, a colleague’s personal and professional life, and her teaching practice, as we see in the following excerpt:

Missy: The science support teacher is suddenly doing 100% industry stuff and nothing else. It is eating up her life, and the rest of us are sitting back, saying: “We do not have any help here [in the school].” And the science support teacher is up until 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. . . . She is responsible. I am doing the work at the school level as are three other teachers, but she is responsible. And it is killing her . . . So the point is this: We have a real political thing going on here. In one corner is the industry project . . . and [it] wants more money . . . And then there is the national school reform initiative that is not unreasonable at all.

Not only did her experiences of the two reform projects become meshed in her personal practical knowledge, but they were also interpreted as competing, even conflicting, projects by her colleagues who also started to view what was going on in a combined, though definitely not a cohesive, fashion. She acknowledges the political situation surrounding the two grants and the tensions between them. However, although the problems were identified, not giving them the attention they deserved contributed another important element of “the real political thing” going on.

Instead of passively accepting her science colleagues’ interpretation of the situation, Missy attended a school-based national reform initiative meeting on her campus and discovered what she and [others] had been told was “propaganda . . . fabrication.” After personally experiencing the reform meeting, Missy realized that, contrary to others’ voiced opinions, books could have been purchased and conferences attended with the reform movement award, but the funds could not be used to have someone
write the science curriculum. Missy saw this separation as being reasonable and understandable; after all, the science initiative was supported by the major multiyear grant. Consequently, she formally apologized to Harriet Anderson, the coordinator of the whole school reform effort. Missy further noted that she had always seen Harriet as one of the most fair and level-headed people in the school; hence, her opinion was positively reinforced by how Harriet conducted the meeting.

A few months later, Missy was given another in a series of opportunities to narrate her version of how events were unfolding in her school. On that occasion, she contrasted the reception of the two reform initiatives introduced to the school context:

Missy: Everything seems to be moving in a positive direction in the national reform initiative. But there is the inevitable clash with the industry-sponsored initiative, which is... not motivated to move along smoothly. ...People get irritated with it and there is so much pressure coming down from the top... We are doing curriculum writing and there is this heavy, heavy push... for us to make progress. ...People are really frustrated. ...It takes up huge amounts of time.

Researcher: And with the whole-school reform initiative?
Missy: We get to pick what we want to do. But teachers do not get to pick in the [science] project. ...So many crisscrosses in beliefs, it is bizarre.

In the above passage, Missy implicitly recognizes that the two reform initiatives operated according to different “theories of action” (Hatch, 1998; Schön & McDonald, 1998). The first theory of change appeared to funnel imperatives into schools and treat teachers as functionaries whose knowledge is lacking, whereas the second one seemed to approach teachers as holders and users of knowledge who are capable of authoring how and what reform efforts should take place within their particular school contexts. Yet, both change efforts were authorized, to varying degrees, by the school district conduit.

About the same time, members of the teacher research group, in their third year of sustained inquiry, also articulated differences between the two reform initiatives, much like Missy had done previously. We now introduce a passage from the transcribed text of a teacher research meeting. In this excerpt, Teachers 1 and 3 are experienced teachers, while Teachers 2 and 4 are beginning teachers. Teacher 3 was a language arts teacher who did not regularly attend school reform meetings; Teacher 4’s previous career was in business.

Teacher 1: We have competing grants here...
Teacher 2: Actually, dueling grants...
Teacher 3: They are dueling grants...
Teacher 2: (Hums “Dueling Banjos”)
Teacher 1: And some of us, like Teacher 3, are heavily involved in different aspects of both initiatives.
Teacher 4: And can see different underlying principles as to how people are worked with and the respect given teachers and their knowledge . . .
Teacher 3: [Referring to science initiative] Do you treat people well by bleeding them dry like turnips?
Teacher 1: Well, the differences are not surprising. . . . [One] is a huge philanthropic endeavor founded on high ideals; the other has corporate sponsors.
Teacher 3: The industry initiative is not philanthropic [in the same sense].
Teacher 1: It is looking for workers.
Teacher 4: It is founded on the principles on which Wall Street is founded. . . .
Teacher 2: (Repeats “Dueling Banjos”)

In this exchange, members of the teacher research group use the “Dueling Banjos” metaphor to convey their narrative understanding of the philosophical, political, and practical relationships between the two reform initiatives. Like Missy Ibarra, they pinpoint differences in principles, approaches, sources of funding, and personal experiences. Like Ibarra, they find themselves immersed in an institutional cover story—one that ignores different theories of how change occurs—that they were collectively authorized to live and officially felt compelled to tell. In this way, conflicting ideas about who authors change and how change happens became smoothed over, allowing the reforming school context to appear like a still pond, while a tempest swirled beneath its surface and within Missy’s (and others’) narrative knowledge.

Reflective Turn on Cover Stories Emanating From Dueling Views of Change

In this third story, narratives sanctioned for in-service teachers to articulate and enact compete with each other within the school context and within individual teacher’s narrative knowing. Although individual teachers like Missy and groups of teachers like Teachers 1–4 in the teacher research group name and openly discuss, among themselves and with the researcher, the dueling theories of change experienced in their school contexts, they never take up the conversation with the representatives of the stories of reform or with others positioned above them in the hierarchy. This would not have been as problematic if both versions of reform were given equal credence on the school landscape. However, the story of the industry curriculum project, with its rational, objective claims, better fit with the sacred story of how the school district wanted “things to be” and was accorded heightened stature in the school district schema of affairs. As a result, the other reform story, the whole school reform initiative, risked being crowded out by the belief in one true/one correct/one best version of teachers and their professional practices. Hence, the institutional preference for the science story of reform resulted in the glossing over of important considerations—most significantly, the role of teachers’ knowledge in school reform efforts—that could spur educative rather than mis-educative livings and tellings.
CONCLUSIONS

Through the use of three storied examples—(1) cover stories emanating from institutional prescription, (2) cover stories situated at the juncture between teachers’ stories and school stories, and (3) cover stories arising from conflicting views of change—we have more thoroughly addressed how cover stories evident in our research programs are developed, lived, and told in order to cope with evolving moral, ethical, epistemological, political, and systemic dilemmas in which teachers feel compelled to claim to know (or show) what they know (but not as a favored interpretation), and claim to not know (or show) what they do know (as a favored interpretation). This double storying, or at times, multistorying (which is further complicated by teachers’ dual roles as conservers and renewers of the field of education), has profound implications for teachers’ knowledge, identities, and professional decision-making as individuals and as professional colleagues.

Miseducative Implications for Individuals

Enormous stress is created when individual teachers attempt to live or tell stories given to them by others while simultaneously covering up, yet living, the story created through their own narrative authority. Telling and trying to live cover stories leads to enormous energy-draining entailments such as self-deception (Crites, 1979), feelings of inauthenticity (Brown, 1991), alienation (Olson, 1993), teacher isolation (Graham, 2000), victimization, denigration, and systemic and systematic denial of what is known (Willis & Craig, 2000). As we have shown, self-deception and inauthenticity are present to varying degrees in each of the stories that we have correspondingly featured, particularly in the text about Liz. Alienation is likewise evident in Pat’s story, whereas comprehensive denial that results from political entailments emerge in the narratives formed around Missy and her colleagues’ contextualized knowledge of school reform.

Miseducative Implications in Professional Contexts

“Perhaps it is an obvious point that whose stories are told, and for what purpose, influences what is said, but it is also an easily forgotten truth” offer Bullough and Baughman (1997, p. 43). Educators need to deftly balance the tension between the constraints created by the canonical quality of the stories that their institutions construct, and the narrative knowledge that individuals create. It is necessary that they do so in order to awaken to new possibilities for living more educative teaching stories.
Yet, when communally authored versions become the only authorized version, telling and living new versions becomes extraordinarily difficult. Furthermore, telling and living unauthorized versions can result in severe social consequences, as our storied examples make apparent. Imagine the personal, interpersonal, and career grief that preservice and in-service teachers would encounter if they expressed, without reservation, their narrative knowing of such matters as other teachers’ classrooms, district training sessions, and multimillion-dollar reform efforts. It is one thing for those situated further up the hierarchy to assert such claims, but quite another for those positioned further down the line to articulate contrary beliefs. This is because opportunities for voicing profound statements of belief are entitlements (the sole right of certain privileged individuals in a hierarchy), regardless of whether the hierarchy is one of knowledge, power, or position.

**Educative Possibilities**

Teachers do not always consciously know that they are living cover stories. Part of learning to live cover stories is to downplay what we know, even though our actions are driven by the “real” story. Unless there are spaces for all stories to be brought out into the open and made public with others, they continue to form unreflective bases for professional practice and decision-making (Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995; Randall, 1995; Ritchie & Wilson, 2000; Schön, 1983). Knowledge communities become safe places within which each individual teacher’s narrative authority is recognized and developed. These communities of knowing take shape around common places of experience (Lane, 1988) rather than around bureaucratic and hierarchical relations that determine who knows, what should be known, and what constitutes “good teaching” and “good schools.” In knowledge communities, preservice and in-service teachers tentatively explore how they are making sense of situations, explain their own actions, and excavate their stories in concert with others. Ritchie and Wilson (2000) remind us, “When teachers are given the opportunity to compose and reflect on their own stories of learning and of selfhood within a supportive and challenging community, then teachers can begin to resist and revise the scripting narratives of the culture and begin to compose new narratives of identity and practice” (p. 1).

The three stories featured in this article, for example, were birthed in knowledge communities of this sort. In each of the highlighted examples, the development of sustained unconditional relationships made it possible for individuals’ narrative authority to be articulated, examined, confirmed, expanded, or revised in light of others’ experiences and others’ reflections and responses to experiences.
If we value the narrative knowledge that individual teachers and groups of teachers hold and express, spaces need to be made for all stories to be told. According to Ritchie and Wilson (2000),

The interplay of multiple and often conflicting narratives of professional and personal history, we believe, can provide the catalyst for reflection, critique, and “re-vision” that initiate and sustain teachers’ capacity to resist confining cultural narratives and to write new narratives of teaching and living, thus recomposing themselves as teachers and as individuals. (p. 7)

In this way, we can begin to open up inquiry in ways that may help us understand the moral layeredness (Hansen, 1993) underpinning teachers’ practices, and uncover the links and gaps between cover stories, sacred stories, and narrative authority. The telling of stories within knowledge communities is the first step in attending mindfully to their meanings (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995). Learning to retell stories of practice in healthier, more instructive ways leads to the heightened generation of educative possibilities in personal and institutional life.

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NOTES

1. The authors are grateful to reviewers over time for their insightful comments, which have greatly enhanced this article.

2. Different authors employ narrative meta-level analysis for different purposes. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) compiled different narratives written by different authors to explore the formation of teachers’ identities. Craig (2002) surveyed how different aspects of the conduit emerged in her research studies over time and across contexts. Czarniawka (1997) used a number of narratives to portray a meta view of institutional identity.

3. The following excerpt (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) gives a brief explanation of how the terms “story” and “narrative” tend to be used in narrative inquiry.
“The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world. . . . Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study. . . . [W]e use the reasonably well-established device of calling the phenomenon ‘story’ and the inquiry ‘narrative.’ Thus, we say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narrative of experience” (p. 2).

4. School and school district amalgamations had occurred in the Canadian province because of population decline and economic constraints. Centralization is another way to describe what happened as some schools closed, others were required to share administrators, and several school districts were combined.

REFERENCES


