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ABSTRACT

The experiences of six vocational education teachers from several high schools in Chesapeake County, Maryland, who "lived under" the educational reforms of the past 2 decades were examined in a phenomenological study. The study, which used the approach designed by Van Manen in "Researching Lived Experience," included consideration of the researcher's personal experience; the experiential descriptions of others; open-ended and repeated conversations with teachers to generate themes and key words or phrases that open up the phenomenon; etymological tracings of words to reveal more about the phenomenon; and experiential descriptions found in literate and art to understand the phenomenon more fully. The teacher's experience under school reform was determined to be similar to the following stages of grief experienced by dying patients: (1) denial and isolation; (2) anger; (3) bargaining; (4) depression; and (5) acceptance. The stories collected during the study provided evidence that sharing their stories of "life under reform" helps vocational teachers feel less alone, enables them to begin imagining and talking about a better future under reform, and allows them to put their pain to good use by understanding how it has transformed them. The importance of school reform and teachers finding ways to draw strength from one another was emphasized. (Contains 24 references.) (MN)

PLAYING BY SOMEONE ELSE'S RULES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF VOCATIONAL TEACHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES UNDER SCHOOL REFORM

by

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CHAPTER I: TURNING TO THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TEACHERS UNDER SCHOOL REFORM

Reform, RE-form, Re-FORM? Being Called by the Question

To teach today, at least in a public school in the United States, means to teach under the influence of school reform. This demand seems to grow in size and scope with each successive school year. Public school teachers are under more scrutiny and pressure today than at any time in my memory, and much of the reason is manifest in what we now call school reform. What does it mean to reform, re-form? Who does the forming? Who is formed? What is it like to live in a new form?

Noticeably absent, conspicuously so in a sense, in the debate on school reform are the voices of teachers, more particularly, the voices of vocational teachers. Why is this so? Is it that teachers are not talking or thinking about reform, or is it that no one, including the media, is listening? Does the public believe teachers are too biased, when it comes to reform, to speak the truth? Or is it that school reform has been simplified by those driving its agenda and that the voices of teachers would only complicate the issues? Can the experiences of teachers living under reform teach us anything? What accounts for the missing voices, and therefore, the stories of what it is like to be a vocational teacher under reform?

Perhaps the stories and voices of vocational teachers are missing because the thrust of most school reform of the past two decades has been to improve academic skills, as opposed to the career oriented nature of vocational education. This is ironic, because according to Hoyt, "First every education reform proposal of the 1980s was rooted in the need to increase America's ability to compete in the international marketplace" (National Assessment of Vocational Education, 1998, p. 2) Perhaps the missing voices of vocational teachers, though a small minority of educators, do have something to bring to the school reform dialogue. Might the voices of vocational teachers resonate with the similarly unheard voices of their students? Perhaps vocational teachers, as a minority,

view and experience school reform in ways that their academic colleagues do not? What can others learn from vocational teachers as they describe their lived experiences under school reform?

My view of school reform originates from the teacher's perspective, in contrast to nearly everything that is reported about school reform in the news and published in research reports. Likewise, my primary interest is in the lives of teachers in this era of reform—their being and their ability to teach. Having been a vocational teacher in public high schools for the past 21 years, my vantage point for viewing school reform has been as a participant and not as a spectator. Therefore, as one who has been re-formed, it is very natural that I study school reform from the teacher's vantage point according to Merleau-Ponty, "...the thinker never thinks from any starting-point but the one constituted by what he is" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1992, p. xix).

My Entering Question

My research emanates from the following question: **What is the lived experience of vocational teachers under school reform**? By alternately standing very close to the question and at other times gazing intently upon it from afar, all the while keeping the question of "what is it like" firmly in mind, my goal is to allow others to experience school reform from the perspective of a vocational educator. Through this process we might gain some insight into the being of teachers as we experience some of the thoughts, feelings, and decisions teachers live with each day as they dwell, and teach, under school reform. If teachers are the most important element in a successful classroom, it would be wise to learn more about how the changes we call school reform affect their teaching and their being in school.

I studied the lived experience of teaching under school reform, using the approach designed by van Manen (1990) in Researching Lived Experience. The following components are part of this process: "turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world; investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it; reflecting on essential themes which characterize the phenomenon; describing the phenomenon through the art of writing

and rewriting; maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; and balancing the research context by considering parts and whole" (pp. 30-31). The text for my research includes: personal experience of the researcher; experiential descriptions of others; open-ended and repeated conversations with teachers to generate themes and key words or phrases that open up the phenomenon; etymological tracings of words to reveal more about the phenomenon; idiomatic phrases; as well as experiential descriptions found in literature and art to understand the phenomenon more fully.

My own experiences as a vocational teacher for the past 21 years, in five very different types of schools, are also an integral part of this phenomenological journey. These experiences, in comprehensive, vocational, and magnet schools have not only brought me to the question of study, but has also given me access to the inner world of vocational teachers.

Vocational Education and School Reform

Vocational education, itself an early method of re-forming public education, personifies school reform by changing the face of education from a strictly liberal arts curriculum to a more inclusive one that includes courses which prepare students for the world of work as well as for college.

The quantitative reforms of the early 1980s, with their emphasis on requiring more academic credits for graduation, seem to have left high school students with less time for vocational subjects:

> From 1982 to 1994, there was a general decline in the participation of high school students in vocational education. The average number of vocational credits public high school graduates earned decreased over the period studied, as did the percentage of graduates completing a sequence of related occupational courses. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000, p. vi)

These reforms also may have reinforced the division between academics and vocational subjects because colleges were looking increasingly at the quantity and quality of a student's academic subjects. Also, with certain academic courses being designated as G/T or honors, vocational

students had a very hard time making it into the upper levels of rank for their graduating class (National Assessment of Vocational Education, 1998, p. 23).

The more integrative strategies of the second wave of reforms in the later 1980s and 1990s seem to hold more promise for vocational education. New courses, such as Applied Technology have been added, and vocational subjects are increasingly housed in the same building as their academic counterparts. But, it seems that it is the vocational teachers who have put more emphasis on academics (reading, writing, and math) to satisfy the integration of vocational and academics as called for in Perkins II. Does this speak more to how each is valued, the stratification of the curriculum, the practicalities of teaching certain subject matter, or to the increased pressure for raising scores on standardized tests?

Vocational Education Under Reform in Chesapeake County and Maryland

I asked colleagues to list school reforms over the last decade in three areas: reforms that came down from the state of Maryland; those reforms that came from Chesapeake County; and school reforms that mainly affected vocational education. Among the many reforms implemented in Maryland during the last decade cited by these teachers were functional math and reading tests, high school assessments, the school report card, changes in teacher certification, and increased graduation requirements. Among the many school reforms that have impacted Chesapeake County Public Schools over the past decade—in both academic and vocational education—are site-based management, magnet programs and schools, inclusion for special education students, teacher mentoring, county exit exams, and elimination of the administrative leadership program for teachers known as the "the phases."

Finally, colleagues listed the school reforms that affected vocational education in Chesapeake County: the closing of all but one vocational center; vocational completer programs; institution of technology education courses and graduation requirements; Tech Prep (part of Perkins II); movement of career and technology courses from vocational to comprehensive schools; the

Technology Achievement Guarantee (TAG) program in which the county guarantees to retrain any student who is a vocational completer and is found by an employer to be deficient in a job skill; the closing of many trade and industry programs and courses, the institution of allied health in the curriculum; and changing the name from vocational to career and technology at both the state and county levels. Perhaps there are other school reforms, either in Chesapeake County or in the state of Maryland that my colleagues and I did not name.

Listening to My Own Voice

In desiring to give teachers a voice in school reform, I must first know and understand my own voice with respect to teaching under school reform. Does being so close to reform make it harder to step back and see the view beyond my own valley?

Why do I feel so stifled by many aspects of reform, and how has this affected my being? Teaching under school reform, at times, feels like a battle! Is telling the truth—as I see it—worth the cost? Is the danger I feel real? How universal are my experiences with school reform?

Some bad lessons. Why does the very mention of the term, school reform, cause me to have a negative reaction? Perhaps it is because, as vocational teachers, it feels like we are continually being told what additional tasks we will have to perform as a result of school reform, OR ELSE? For me, the term school reform has a harsh ring to it and feels more like the institution that one gets when the two words are transposed. Also, school reform has such as business-like quality about it that speaks more about the "bottom line" than about its participants or procedures. It seems to me that vocational teachers have long been given the message that they should keep quiet and do as they are told with respect to school reform. Also, I feel sad for my students who have even less input and control over school reform than I do.

School reform in Maryland seems to be dominated by policy makers who are far from the lived-experience of the classroom. In my experience, fear has been the tool of choice for implementing school reform. Fear over losing your position, schedule, school, room, or

manageable class size, or being given undesirable classes or duty assignments seems to keep most, if not all, teachers in line.

Why listen to Teachers?

Michael Fullan (1991), in The New Meaning of Educational Change, writes:

> Neglect of the phenomenology of change—that is, how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended—is at the heart of the spectacular lack of success of most social reforms. (p. 4)

Noticeably absent, perhaps even nonexistent in the effort to reform schools, is any measure of "how people actually experience change." This void does not go unnoticed by vocational teachers, many of whom take it as an affront. Instead, the intent of reform often feels like it was sacred and written in stone. The root word of intend, tend, means "to aim at, move toward" (Skeat, 1963, p. 546). Policy makers may aim their school reforms, but without the help of teachers, they will have a much harder time of hitting their target.

"If educational change is to happen, it will require that teachers understand themselves and be understood by others" (Fullan, 1991, p. 117). The term understand comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *understandan* which means "to stand under or among" (Skeat, 1963, p. 583). It seems that school reform requires teachers to stand in a new form, to be re-formed. By studying the lived experience of vocational teachers under school reform, we can come closest to standing among teachers by trying to get at the essence of the phenomenon. Both of Fullan's suggestions—to understand myself and to help other vocational teachers to understand teaching under reform—are integral aspects of my phenomenological journey.

Hultgren, in Toward Curriculum for Being, provides us with a vital reason why we should listen to teachers' experiences with school reform:

> Finding out what an experience is like in the words of the one experiencing it creates a new discourse that is empowering. It gives back power to individuals and does not merely hold onto an experts's view as educator or researcher or philosopher. (1991, p. 28)

Why does no one seem to be asking teachers about their experiences with school reform? Do reformers feel that asking teachers about reform would be akin to opening pandora's box? Do teachers feel neglected when they are not asked about reform—either before or after it happens? Do teachers talk to each other about reform, either to seek help or solace?

Unfortunately, there are no inservice courses entitled "Coping with Reform." Teachers are forced to come to terms with school reform and its implications as best they can, and for many it presents a struggle nearly as difficult as teaching itself. Will teaching under reform exacerbate the impending teacher shortage? Perhaps studying the lived experiences of vocational teachers under reform is a valid response to the teacher shortage.

Dwelling Under Reform

Vocational teachers, by living in the classroom with students, have insights into how schools may be improved—both in effectiveness and in efficiency. Listening to the voices of these teachers can help in re-forming schools into an image that is befitting this democratic institution. Schools are more than curriculum and facilities, they are places where people dwell together in learning.

According to Heidegger, building and dwelling are related. "The Old English and High German word for building, *buan*, means to dwell. This signifies: "to remain, to stay in a place" Heidegger, 1971, p. 146). Does dwelling in school provide teachers with a special insight with regard to school reform? Moreover, if we continue further with Heidegger's understanding of what it is to dwell, is this dwelling by teachers in schools threatened under school reform? "To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving" (Heidegger, 1971, p. 149). Is our current notion of school reform, one of change, at odds with Heidegger's notion of sparing and preserving? What should be preserved? What should change?

Reform as Journey

Might school reform offer a profound lesson for vocational teachers? By stopping, looking, and listening to reform, teachers may learn more, not only about schools, but also about themselves and their world. Perhaps becoming more observant and thoughtful, as they journey along the path to school reform, will help vocational teachers to become more alive for themselves and their students. It seems as if such a journey—one of discovering new landscapes of teaching, sharing stories, learning new ways of "being" and teaching—could be an antidote to the apathy, passivity, and anger that many vocational teachers feel as they move along their journey to school reform. Maybe school reform holds a new perspective through which vocational teachers may see themselves in a new light, one that allows a re-forming of themselves as teachers.

CHAPTER II: EXPLORING THE PHENOMENON OF LIVING "UNDER" REFORM

Mourning the Loss of Place

> I've always been in a position to give input, but my viewpoints aren't listened to. There's a point where sometimes I think I get ignored. Why I get ignored my have to do with some of the other prejudicial feelings that I sometimes feel across campus in terms of where my "place" is. That's the funny thing about high schools. Like, how would this person [know]? She's a vocational teacher...it's really weird. (vocational teacher in Little, 1996, p. 27)

What experiences lie beneath the words that the vocational teacher has spoken in the quote above? Is teaching under reform like an iceberg, where only the tip is visible, and the great bulk likes hidden beneath the surface? How long does it take for words like those of the vocational teacher quoted above to form and to show themselves? What will it take for the place of vocational teachers to be recognized in school reform?

Exploring the phenomenon of vocational teachers' lived experiences under reform allows us to stand in the intersection between policy and being, two dimensions that occur at the same time and place—the former visible on the surface, and the latter looming beneath the surface, but with the power to sustain or to break the life of policy. Vocational teachers and students are often perceived as separate or different, from those who teach and study academic subjects. Perhaps this

separation carries over into how they experience and find their place within school reform. It appears that vocational teachers and students must adapt to both the broader notions of school reform and to vocational reform if they are to remain intact, keep their place, and avoid becoming either increasingly marginalized or even extinct.

The Power of Place

How strong and important is a sense of place in the lived-world of vocational teachers? I have trouble getting used to a new room, let alone a new school. When my department loses one of "our rooms" to another department, both my students and I feel a sense of loss. We both ask why is this happening to us? We are never given an answer that makes us feel like we had any voice in the matter.

What is it like for a vocational teacher to begin anew at another school? Perhaps teachers need a space of their own to feel comfortable? Teaching also requires many tools and supplies, and just getting these into place can take a long time. A new place can offer new possibilities, new learning, new growth. Might school reform also be a new place that offers teachers a chance to start over in a new space and to learn new ways of "being?" Perhaps school reform is as much about a new mental place as it is about physical place.

Casey writes that "places not only are, but they happen" (1993, p. 27). Does school reform make teachers happy just to survive? Perhaps being displaced is an essential part of reform because it seeks to re-form teachers and change how and where they place themselves in school? Casey describes why one must be in a place to know how it feels: "There is no knowing or sensing a place except by being in that place and to be in a place is to be in a position to perceive it" (1993, p. 18). Should reformers spend time in a school before they make changes to it? Phenomenology, with its basis is lived experience, allows us to gain a sense of place from those who dwell and teach in a given place. How does it feel when school reform misses the importance of place in the lives of teachers?

The Five Stages of Dying/Teaching Under Reform

I am sometimes struck how much my journey, the lived experience of being a vocational teacher under school reform, is similar to the five stages of dying patients as put forth by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in her landmark book On Death and Dying. Kubler-Ross gives life to the grief and loss that both vocational teachers under school reform and dying patients experience.

Stage One: Denial and Isolation

According to Kubler-Ross, the first stage a patient experiences upon receiving bad news is denial and isolation: "Denial functions as a buffer after unexpected shocking news, allows the patient to collect himself and, with time, mobilize other, less radical defenses" (Kubler-Ross, 1969, p. 39). Vocational teachers receive shocking news—that they have lost their positions or schedules or shops—oftentimes under the guise of school reform, from their principal or chairperson, and mostly in the spring. What is it like when vocational teachers experience denial and isolation as a defense against school reform?

School reform is heard by some teachers with great pain. Perhaps this pain causes them to hear nothing new because they are too afraid to listen, expecting only bad news. It seems like school reform feels like a grim medical prognosis for some vocational teachers. Might this cause them to miss hearing some things about school reform they need to hear?

It seems like many vocational teachers working under reform, like very ill patients, are afraid to look into the mirror. Perhaps school reform offers teachers a mirror by which they may see themselves from another perspective—one which gives them new self-knowledge. How does it feel to be afraid to see yourself and your teaching from a new angle?

Perhaps vocational teachers need someone else to be their mirror at times, a human mirror who will be there to show them how things are and one who cares—be it another teacher or the one who brings the news. I have found that most teachers will talk when they are ready, provided they trust you, and that "they will open up and share their loneliness..." (Kubler-Ross, 1969, p. 45).

What would it be like for vocational teachers to have someone available to listen to them, about teaching under reform, without judging? It seems like those in schools are too busy doing and so are unavailable to sit, care, and be.

Stage Two: Anger

Kubler-Ross writes about her second attitude toward tragedy, anger:

> When the first stage of denial cannot be maintained any longer, it is replaced by feelings of anger, rage, envy, and resentment. The next logical question becomes: "Why me?" (Kubler-Ross, 1969, p. 50)

What is it like for a vocational teacher to be angry about school reform? Perhaps it is only normal to be angry at something imposed on you and over which you have no say. Is the source of a teacher's anger a lack of respect, the threat of change, or the powerlessness felt? It seems like the anger that vocational teachers feel toward reform might easily get displaced onto others—students, colleagues, administrators, loved ones, and even onto themselves. Might teachers get even more angry because reform seems to move ahead, full-steam, despite or oblivious to their anger toward school reform? Might the pain teachers feel, when they are angry about reform, be a path to "being" if they are able to see, acknowledge, express, and shoulder their anger as they journey to reform?

According to Kubler-Ross, "The problem here is that few people place themselves in the patient's position and wonder where this anger might come from" (Kubler-Ross, 1969, p. 51). Vocational teachers feel lonely and uncared for when no one seems to notice their anger over reform.

Perhaps vocational teachers, working under school reform, need to feel respected and understood if their anger is to go away. Respect comes from the Latin *respectus* and means "to look at" (Skeat, 1963, p. 445). How does it feel to be "looked at" by others? Teachers must feel cared for and respected in order to function at their highest. The same seems to be true of the students that I teach. Maybe vocational teachers must respect themselves before others will respect them.

Might teachers respect reform more favorably if they are understood and respected as the human beings who make reform come to life?

Stage Three: Bargaining

According to Kubler-Ross, the third stage, bargaining, is:

> ...really an attempt to postpone; it has to include a prize offered 'for good behavior,' it also sets a self-imposed 'deadline' (e.g., one more performance, the son's wedding), and it includes an implicit promise that the patient will not ask for more if this one postponement is granted. (Kubler-Ross, 1969, pp. 83-84)

What is it like for vocational teachers to bargain while teaching under school reform? What do they offer to give up of themselves in order to stay in teaching as it is now posited under school reform? Perhaps teachers rationalize their difficult roles when they do things the way they have always done them—instead of doing it the school reform way. How does it feel when teachers say "maybe I'll be retired or in another position before this reform gets fully implemented."

Bargain is related to the Latin word *barcaniare*, "to change about" (Skeat, 1963, p. 39). Might something be changed about when vocational teachers bargain under school reform—be it their self-image, the curriculum, their students, or the school itself? Maybe bargaining under reform result in the teacher's "being" getting discounted. Might bargaining under reform be a way for vocational teachers to prepare themselves for change—mentally and emotionally? Perhaps bargaining allows teachers to "stay on the fence," instead of saying yes or no, until it suits them to get off, or until someone or something pushes them off the fence that separates them from school reform.

Stage Four: Depression

The fourth stage, depression, involves loss. Kubler-Ross separates depression into two categories: reactive depression which deals with past loss, and preparatory depression which takes into account losses that are about to happen, those on the horizon. What is it like when vocational teachers experience loss because of school reform? Perhaps loss causes teachers to look backward,

to the days before reform, instead of to the future where more losses loom. Might living in the moment, "being," be more difficult when loss and fear pervade the teacher's consciousness. Perhaps sadness and grief are a language of being. What does the way we deal with loss tell us about ourselves? Maybe teachers must accept and trust their sadness before they can accept, trust, and even thrive under school reform. Perhaps school reform has put vocational teachers "in the midst of a transition where we cannot remain standing" (Rilke, 1984, p. 84). It seems they must find and hear their own voice, listening carefully to "being," and then move forward as a community to take a leadership role in re-forming schools.

Stage Five: Acceptance

> The last and final stage of which Kubler-Ross writes is acceptance:
>
> Acceptance should not be mistaken for a happy stage. It's almost void of feelings. It is as if the pain had gone, the struggle is over, there comes a time for the "final rest before the long journey" as one patient phrased it. (Kubler-Ross, 1969, p. 113)

How does it feel when vocational teachers, who struggle against school reform, eventually come to accept it? Is their attitude or their teaching re-formed? Maybe they are just tired—worn out from fighting reform. Perhaps some even see value in reform. Or, maybe they decided to accept reform in order to keep their jobs. Even after accepting reform, do teachers ever forget the pain they experience in the process? Perhaps acknowledging and accepting the pain of reform, and its effect upon being, is something vocational teachers must do before they can accept being re-formed.

On my journey to understand the experience of teaching under reform, I have passed through each of these five stages. Sometimes I have gotten lost in one stage or moved on only to double-back by accident, providence, or because I really didn't know my route. Perhaps the path through these stages is not linear. Maybe, each year and under new reforms, one must re-experience one or more of these stages.

According to Kubler-Ross, there is one common element to each of the five stages: "the one thing that usually persists through all these stages is hope." (1969, p. 138) How is it different for vocational teachers to travel with hope instead of hopelessly? It seems like negative feelings toward reform can create a self-fulfilling prophecy and dry up hope; whereas, positive expectations about reform serve to replenish the well. Might teachers be "burned out" when their well of hope is dry?

A Double-Standard

As a teacher, if often feels like education today, under the auspices of school reform, has two standards—one very humane and people-centered for students, and another for teachers that is more business-like, competitive, and oriented to the bottom line—be it money or test scores.

It seems like school reform has two voices for vocational teachers. There is the public voice, that found in the media and in policy statements, and the private voice, found in the hearts of teachers who experience reform on a daily basis. These two voices of school reform seem to be speaking different languages. Maybe that is why teachers cannot easily understand the public voice. What would these two voices have to say to each other if they were able to converse with each other? Perhaps there are many variations of voices on reform—even with each teacher—and hearing each one is what vocational teachers must do before they can speak on reform.

It seems like vocational teachers must acknowledge their grief about school reform and then move beyond this pain and sorrow to an awareness and trust of their own "being" as they walk the path of school reform. Perhaps phenomenology will allow us to hear the many voices of teachers with respect to reform and to give them back in such a way that both the singers and the audience will both be moved to a new place and a deeper understanding.

CHAPTER THREE: PHILOSOPHIC GROUNDING OF HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLGY AND METHODOLOGY

The Participants and the Process for my Study

In my research to understand the lived experiences of vocational teachers under reform, I conversed with six vocational teachers from several high schools in Chesapeake County (pseudonym), representing a variety of vocational subject areas. School reforms that have occurred in the county and Maryland during the past ten years are the focus of reform here. Such reforms include site-based management, magnet programs and schools, closing of vocational centers and movement of career and technology courses to the comprehensive high schools, changes in graduation requirements, Perkins II, special education inclusion, vocational completer programs, Tech Prep, technology education courses, and the closing of many trade and industry programs.

The teachers were selected based on discussions with, and suggestions from, fellow vocational teachers in the county. They were selected for their interest in and willingness to participate in this study, as well as their ability to speak compellingly about their lived experiences under school reform. There were two White females, three White males, and one Hispanic male in my group of six vocational teachers. All of these vocational teachers had at least ten years of teaching experience in their subject area. This teaching experience provided them with a frame of reference with respect to school reform.

In order to maintain the independence of my research and insure that participants are safe from retribution, all conversations were conducted after and away from school and were approximately 90 minutes to 120 minutes in length. The conversations were tape recorded and each participant was engaged in three separate conversations over the course of several months in the summer of 2000. The recorded conversations were transcribed into text for study. Since none of the conversations took place in a school, I did not seek or need the permission of the school district for my research. It is the teachers' experiences that are being referenced, not the schools. No schools are identified by name.

As a researcher who is also a teacher in Chesapeake County, I faced a significant dilemma about whether to seek permission from the county school system to conduct my research with vocational teachers in an effort to address authentically their lived experiences under school reform. Recognizing the school system's interest in what comes out of this research had to be weighed against protecting the identity of the teachers who participated in this study. In the end, I chose not to seek the school system's permission because it is imperative to this research that the participants not feel constrained by their position within the school system. It is my feeling that vocational teachers would not feel comfortable, nor perhaps be able to describe truthfully, their lived experiences under school reform if the conversations were conducted at the teachers' own schools. The complexities of making these choices was difficult for me as a human science researcher. Might the vocational teachers in this study be identifiable, and do they face possible repercussions for what they have described in this text?

The initial contact with each participant was by telephone. During this conversation I described my study and invited each teacher to participate. At the first face-to-face meeting, I provided them a letter of my intent and purpose for the study. I also asked them to sign a consent form. At this first meeting I also began to engage them to tell their stories of being vocational teachers around reforms experiences throughout their teaching in the county. The following questions are examples of those used to open up the conversation: What comes to mind when you hear the term school reform? What reforms would you name as most influencing your teaching? How have these reforms changed your job and life in school? What is it like teaching (your vocational subject area) under these reforms—tell me your story? Subsequent conversations were conducted around questions that arose from their individual texts.

As I used hermeneutic phenomenology as my method for exploring the lived experiences of teaching under school reform, van Manen was my guide. In Researching Lived Experience, he has

developed a framework for phenomenology in studying pedagogical experiences that includes the following components:

1. turning to a phenomenon which seriously interest us and commits us to the world;
2. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. reflecting on essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
6. balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (1990, pp. 31-32)

Text on the lived experience of vocational teachers under school reform might help us understand how the teacher stands in life. It also provides others with the strongest interpretation of how it feels to teach under school reform. The stories and anecdotes of vocational teachers living under reform draw us into a dialogue with the text and allow us to live in the world that only teachers can know. The depth of a text on living under reform allows teachers to remain open as they try to understand and make sense of this lived experience—one with many sides and facets, paradoxes, and unspoken feelings. This is a landscape that cannot be captured in a single portrait or snapshot, one that requires seeing slowly on foot to get a feel for the many undulations and mysteries that lie hidden from views on high.

CHAPTER FOUR: CHANGING PLACES: A SEARCH FOR BELONGING

> Our hunger to belong is the longing to find a bridge across the distance from isolation to intimacy. Every one longs for intimacy and dreams of a nest of belonging in which one is embraced, seen, and loved. Something within each of us cries out for belonging. Like the tree that puts roots deep into clay, each of us needs the anchor of belonging in order to bend with the storms and reach towards the light. (O'Donohue, 1999, p. xxii-xxiii)

The storms of school reform contain the power to isolate vocational teachers by pushing them further to the margins of high schools. Today's high schools, with their emphasis on preparation for college, do not seem to embrace vocational education as an intimate part of their

curriculum. Perhaps having their words heard, embraced, and understood will help vocational teachers to move away from the margins of schools and towards the light that is at the heart of all learning—where they belong. This chapter explores and reflects upon the themes that arose in conversation with six vocational teachers surrounding their lived experiences under school reform.

A sense of belonging is the fertile ground from which mission emerges and grows. When persons feel like they belong—mentally, physically, socially, and spiritually, they can achieve great heights. The six vocational teachers in my study all reveal a strong sense of mission in their teaching. This passion for teaching their respective trades comes through in their voices, bodies, and in their being.

A Sense of Mission

A mission feel like
some place "being" is at home,
where work is living.
--Reinsel, 2001

> An *unemployed* existence is a worse negation of life than death itself. Because to live means to have something definite to do—a mission to fulfill—and in the measure in which we avoid setting our life to something, we make it empty... Human life, by its very nature, has to be dedicated to something.
> (Jose Ortega y Gasset, in Peter, 1977, p. 536)

This sense of mission is the grounding for the other themes that emerge from my conversations with these six vocational teachers. Perhaps it is only natural that vocational teachers feel a sense of mission toward their chosen subject area, since vocation comes from the Latin word, *vocatio*, which refers to a calling (Guralnik, 1986, p. 1090). Buechner offers a more generous and humane image of vocation as "the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet" (1993, p. 119). Indeed, these vocational teachers seem glad to feed the needs of their students and of the world at large with respect to their particular form of learning for life. Vocational teaching seems to allow them to be with young people in a different way than that experienced by academic teachers—the mind/body connection is very important in vocational education.

From Emergency Room to Classroom (Diana)

Nurse—Latin, *nūtrīre*, to nourish. (Skeat, 1963, p. 353)

During high school Diana wanted to become either a nurse or a teacher. At age 40, Diana had fulfilled the second of her two ambitions and became a teacher—a vocational education teacher. Though the classroom was new to her, she was an experienced practitioner in her "subject area." She'd had a 20-year career as a nurse, 15 of those in ER, before deciding to teach, to train, to guide, to mentor students in the nursing profession. Nursing had been her field, her calling, and now she was able to combine her experience in caring for people with the second career choice she had during high school, teaching. She had been a nurse manager in an emergency room, but now she was starting over in a new place. Diana is now in her 11th year of teaching, all at the same school, Bayside, the last remaining vocational center in Chesapeake County. Her students go to their "home school" for half a day and then attend Bayside for 2.5 hours to study in their chosen vocational area. Diana spends four mornings a week at the hospital with her students, practicing the skills and knowledge they have learned in the classroom and lab at Bayside. She likes the challenge, variety, and excitement of living in two worlds, those of the hospital and the school:

> I probably wouldn't be happy just teaching in a building, in a classroom all day. The best part of my job is taking the kids [to the hospital] and the contact with the patients, taking care of patients. (Diana)

The word contact has roots in the Latin word, *contactus*, a touching (Skeat, 1963, p. 108). Diana is able to touch the lives of both her students and her patients by caring for them in the classroom, the school's nursing lab, and in the hospital. Perhaps if Diana was not able to maintain contact through caring for students and patients, she would be out of place as an allied health teacher. Diana's sense of mission for teaching allied health comes through in her caring. Nodding writes on how students learn by watching their teacher care:

> Besides engaging the student in dialogue, the teacher also provides a model. To support her students as ones-caring, she must show them herself as one-caring. (Nodding, 1984, p. 178)

Diana, as a master for her apprentice students, demonstrates her passion for nursing and teaching by modeling the skills, attitude, and demeanor that come with years of practice:

> We've practiced that, they've done it, every skill they do they have to introduce themselves, explain what they're going to do to the patient, it's the whole nine yards, everything you read. Well, then we go to the hospital and it's Mrs. Anderson, I'm scared to death. Ok, come on, I'll go with you, and we'll walk in the room and I'll have to say, "Hi, this is Katy, she's going to be your student nursing assistant, she's going to help you up and make your bed." And they're like, whew! And I'll be like, are you ok? Mm. Hm. Then you need to talk to Mr. Jones while you're makin' his bed. Then I'll get out and kind of stand outside, and a lot of times they don't say anything that first day, so they really get to learn their people skills and all during their education. (Diana)

What is it like to help students to learn how to face and overcome their fears? Might this relationship, one of caring, be something that allows vocational teachers to show and see another side of themselves and their students? Scare has roots in the Icelandic word, *skjarr*, meaning timid and shy (Skeat, 1963, p. 466). Just as students often lack confidence with learning a new skill or working with a new machine, perhaps vocational teachers are timid about their changing place and role within the high school as they teach under school reform.

The Power of Place

We leave our home,
but keep it with us always,
seeking its equal.
--Reinsel, 2000

School reform seems to be moving vocational teachers to a new place. Sometimes this place is physical—often in another school, a comprehensive school instead of a vocational school. In this place that is different from what they have known, they must still instruct their students about how to craft something using their hands. But sometimes this new place is mental, whereby vocational teachers must help prepare their students for the SAT exam. It is in this new place that vocational teachers must help their students to develop a part of their brain that does not require it to work in conjunction with their hands and bodies, a place that seems more at home in the academic wing

than it does in the vocational wing. Casey speaks of how place affects both "how I am with others" and also "who we shall become together" (Casey, 1993, p. 23). Perhaps we should also add that place seems to shape how I am with myself.

Displaced

> ...when I started teaching, I knew I would be teaching what I am a professional at and that is welding, and the blueprint reading and shaping steel and all that. Well, we taught the kids that. And not every kid wanted to be a welder, but the ones that really showed interest, we put 'em to work. I mean I had kids that called me up and said thank you, I'm making sixteen-something an hour, I working down at the (Sparrows) Point, right out of high school. And now, you know people that I meet on the street, that I know 'em for years, and I've worked for in the past, "do you have any kids?" I tell em, I'm not teaching welding any more as a full-time trade. And they say, "What?" They're kind of upset that the county went in and did what they did as far as just disassembling the vocational trades in some of the schools. They're very upset and I feel upset. I get upset because there was nothing and there is nothing I can do about it. (Tom)

What is it like to be displaced from the world you have known? Perhaps the essence of a teacher is found in those teachers, like Tom, who have lost the chance to teach what they know so well and instead have to move to a new place and teach something else—sometimes related, but often very different from their original skill or profession. How long does it take vocational teachers to let go of their old place when they must move to another place?

Reform as a Place of Fear

To Susan, a home economics teacher, the term school reform is closely associated with both fear and place:

> For some reason it kind of frightens me because it implies change. Based on my personal experiences, reform meant, ooh, you're going to lose a wonderful job which I have never even come close to replacing. (Susan)

What is it like to teach vocational education under reform while fearing it? Fear seems to be the lesson that many vocational teachers have learned from reform. Perhaps fear makes it harder to be open to school reform? At first glance, vocational teachers appear to have more to lose, than gain from reform. When no one tells or shows vocational teachers that they have nothing to fear from

reform, their fear does not subside and may even grow. For many vocational teachers, it seems like fear has not subsided enough to allow them to find their way about again. These teachers seem lost under school reform—wondering and wandering what will happen next to them.

Moving into Un-fit Places

As a vocational teacher, what is it like to feel the great distance between your old place and the new one that you must make into a home? Susan describes what it was like when she went over, for the first time, to see where she would be working after she was displaced because of a new magnet school:

> You're not gonna believe this, but I went over there, looked at the Nutrition and Foods lab, built in 1950, NOTHING has been changed. Now, I'm coming in from Northern, I walked in there, I stood in the back of the lab, and I came home and I am not lying, I cried for three days, wondering how am I going to put a program together in that pigsty. And it has only gotten worse in the seven years—and this year was just, I went from one filthy lab to another filthy lab. (Susan)

Being displaced from both your subject and your school, both of which are a big part of your identity as a teacher is a loss that is not easy to re-place. Did Susan lost part of her identity when she was forced into a new place? Can being fill the void that is left when vocational teachers leave something in their old place, or can being guide them as they struggle to find a new place for themselves?

A place without input.

Vocational teachers are part of a system that does not seem to consider them when decisions are made. They feel invisible even though they occupy tangible places within the schools. There seems to be a one-way system of communication where vocational teachers must hear and do what they are told to do, but they are not allowed to reply or suggest anything—much like we used to treat children. Disrespect for vocational education seems to precede the displacement of vocational teachers. Being the last to know something makes one feel uncared for and unimportant.

Though Jerry was not forced from his school, he was displaced when they closed down the

portion of the business program that he had taught for over twenty years without even telling him:

> Disappointed, disappointed in the fact that, again, it was done like, I found out sort of, "Oh, didn't you know that?" from my department chairman one day—something about paralegal. "Well the business program won't be around anymore." I said, It won't?" "No, I didn't!" I mean I never said anything to 'em, but that was really like a low blow. Aw c'mon, I had been here, at the time, probably 23 years, 24 years, don't you think you could walk down and you don't have to ask for my opinion, you can tell me you've already made the decision, but don't you think the courtesy would have been to come and tell me that the program I've been teaching for twenty-some years is, I'm going to do away with it. "But you know, you're welcome to work your way into the other program," which is what I did. That was probably one of the lowest that I've felt, of all the times, the lowest underhanded thing that was done. (Jerry)

Being kept "out of the loop" and learning something "after the fact" seem to be forms of one-way communication that are practiced by school reform. By not even caring about what Jerry had to say, or hearing his voice, he was displaced. Reformers must think their decisions are perfect because they do not seem to want the input of vocational teachers—either before or after their top-down decisions have been implemented.

Jerry seemed to fear that something worse might happen to him if he spoke up about his program being closed and how it was handled. When a teacher's opinion is not sought, becoming the last to know about a decision, there is no belonging in such a place, only temporary lodging, and that leads to repressed feelings.

Losing Your Identity: Moving from Vocational to Technical

Chesapeake County Public Schools updated vocational education by changing its name to Career and Technology Education. Does this new name change anything for the many vocational, now career and technology, teachers who dwell within this designation? The sense of "vocation as a calling" seems to be lost when vocation is no longer used by the school system.

For James, changing the name from vocational to technical seemed to lessen the "second class status" that often seems to accompany vocational education—regardless of what it is called or where it is placed:

It's the old stigma that everybody's going to go to college, your kid is going to go to

> college. And, a lot of parents, there's the stigma of the vocational school. That's why they took vocational out of everything, it's now technology. Yeah, Career and Technology, there are no more vocational schools, they're all technical schools. You change the color of a horse, it's still a horse. We're still doing a lot of the same stuff. You've gotta change with the times...offer more technical courses, change the name, get rid of the stigma that it's voc. ed. (James)

Stigmatize has roots in the French word, *stigmatiser*, and means "to brand with a hot iron, defame" (Skeat, 1963, p. 519). Are vocational students marked for life by their studies in high school? Vocational education is seen, by some, as a defamation to one's character. Must vocational teachers grow into their new name if they are not to be stigmatized and their survival assured?

A familiar place

Vocational education has long been seen by many as a "dumping ground." Under school reform, this "second class" status continues in most schools and even may be exacerbated as schools strive to focus more on SAT scores and preparation for college. In their study, "Work on the Margins: The Experience of Vocational Teachers in Comprehensive High Schools," Little and Threatt write about the function that vocational teachers and their courses serve:

> Vocational teachers and courses serve as a form of "safety valve" in the comprehensive high school, a mechanism for preserving enrollment (forestalling dropout) among those who are not academically successful. Vocational classes are used to absorb increasing number of students who have been designated as "limited-English speaking," "special education," "remedial," or "at risk." Vocational offerings are valued by administrators and counselors to the extent that they appeal successfully to such students.... (Little & Threatt, 1992, p. 4)

Vocational teachers offer a place for students who want to learn their trade and also for those students who have not been successful in academic courses. Living in both of these places seems to have been something that vocational education has always done. In some cases it is hard to tell which came first, wanting to learn a trade, or not being successful in academic classes. Inclusion is a school reform agenda whereby special needs students are moved from separate and isolated classrooms with their own special education teachers, and put back into regular classes. James describes how vocational education has always had special needs students, even before

inclusion came along:

> That's (inclusion) been a big change to the kids. But what inclusion, we've been doing inclusion the whole time. That's another thing—academic people are just now getting it where vocational people have been doing it for years. I had Sandy and David, two of the top students in the (senior) class, and yet I had kids who couldn't even read and write in the same (culinary) class. Well, that's been the norm. (James)

Keeping such a wide range of students working like a team, learning to move forward as a cohesive unit, requires that vocational teachers teach themselves how to juggle. Somehow, vocational teachers seem to be able to keep juggling as school reform keeps tossing them new balls without warning.

Places That Require New Tools

School reform asks vocational teachers to build in ways that are new to them, using tools and techniques they have not held nor tried before. When Chesapeake County asked all teachers to include a reading component in their lessons, vocational teachers struggled to make room for this new addition within their own curriculum. Tom felt like this reform was moving him from his place as a vocational teacher into being some other kind of teacher:

> But now they want us to become English teachers and Reading specialists to these kids. But yet they still want us to teach the curriculum—you know—the area that I'm in. What do you want me to do; do you want me to teach reading or do you want me to teach the area that I'm in?" You know? But they want us to do both, but yet they tell you that they don't want kids to sit in the classroom for more than 20 minutes, in a lecture. Well how in the world are you gonna' do that if you want me to teach the reading part and teach my content area at the same time? I mean I could take an hour tryin' to teach a kid how to read this sentence and how to comprehend it. I'm talkin' about a special ed. kid. It'd take him 15 minutes to figure out that word. It has become a lot more work. (Tom)

Tom speaks to the added time and responsibilities that reform has added to the load that vocational teachers are already carrying. As vocational teachers comprehend the full weight of reform, will they accept the shifting and often increasing nature of their teaching load?

Balancing the new responsibilities that require new skills and tools, may mean that vocational teachers will have to reach out for a helping hand, lest they risk dropping the entire load.

As vocational teachers move into places that were once the exclusive domain of academic teachers, it seems they must find new tools and ways of being with themselves and their students that will make this move something they can find worth the time and effort.

The Search for Who and What we Are

Instead of being isolated, Huebner reminds us that we must remain open, to others and to ourselves, if vocational teachers are to truly live the "vocational" life of teaching:

> A vocation is living life intentionally and openly, not routinely. It means to be prepared to accept newness and surprise, pain and happiness; for these are dimensions of the world that make us rethink, almost daily, who and what we are. Such a life cannot be lived in isolation and privacy. The closed classroom door can be deceptive and illusory; it only hides the inherent communal nature of teaching. (Huebner, 1999, p. 380)

Perhaps by rethinking who and what we are, we as vocational teachers can open up a space, beyond the routine and into the intentional, where we can come together and help each other "accept newness and surprise, pain and happiness." In such a place isolation would give way to community, and the door to the "vocation" of vocational teaching is always open.

For vocational teachers, the journey under school reform is also a journey to discover their own identity and their place within schools. Their identity is something that they have a hand in shaping; it is not fixed in stone. Might the present moment, with their place under school reform still in flux, be an opportunity for vocational teachers to define themselves? If vocational teachers can take the best of who they have been, and combine it with those parts of the present that hold the most promise for a bright future, perhaps their horizon could become limitless? O'Donohue writes about the importance of deciphering our own identity instead of letting others define who we are, and he describes the treasures that await this discovery:

> One of the most crippling prisons is the prison of reduced identity. Each one of us is inevitably involved in deciphering who we actually are. No other can answer that question for you. "Who are you?" is a surface question that has vast intricate rootage.
>
> To grow into the person that your deepest longings is a great blessing. If you can find a creative harmony between your soul and your life, you will have found something that is infinitely precious. You may not be able to do much about the great

> great problems of the world or to change the situation you are in, but if you can awaken the eternal beauty and light of your soul, you will bring light wherever you go. (O'Donohue, 1999, pp. 101-102)

"Hands-On:" Learning From our Bodies

Another form of respect—that of being seen as mentally rigorous—seems to be something that many vocational teachers also desire for their courses that have long been considered easy because they require knowledge that comes from both mind and body. What can being teach us about the body's way of knowing and doing that the mind cannot show us? Hultgren writes of the tension she felt, while student teaching in home economics, between having to demonstrate technique so that her students could learn the subject, and of wanting the freedom to teach it in other ways that were not technocratic:

> The bondage of my identity which I have felt too stifled by...is that of being identified by What I do rather that what I am. I turned to laboratory experiences in the belief that the doing was what fostered learning, but at the same time justified turning to those xperiences by what occurred there—the presencing of our selves with each other through the laboratory encounter. There was an image I had of laboratory work as negative—the equipment—the products made—that focused on low level or "mindless" skills. In a sense I was both dependent on these modes of knowing and yet rejecting them—which served to create a dislike for technical knowing, and maybe even more significantly, covered up the potential for entering into a free relationship with it. (1991, p. 55)

It is in this tension—between knowing and convincing others that vocational courses broaden instead of narrow—that vocational teachers must dwell under school reform. Vocational teachers first must recognize that their subject matter is an excellent vehicle for being with students and for understanding their own being, before they can build a permanent place for themselves and their students in today's schools.

The place vocational teachers build must be strong enough to withstand the winds of change, but still be able to be moved or adapted when the time is right. School reform seems to be an avenue through which vocational teachers can re-identify their being as connected with who they are by what they do. In this way, teaching with technology is a doorway that can allow vocational

teachers to enter into a closer relationship with both their students and their being.

Leaving the Body for the Mind

Moving because you no longer have a place to dwell has left some vocational teachers feeling that school reform has forgotten about students who learn with their hands. Jerry describes the changes his school has gone through in the last decade as it moved from vocational to technical in both name and orientation:

> So at our school, more technical, they got rid of anything "hands-on," skill with a tool, building type things, that was gotten rid of. Everything, anything that was computer, computerized type stuff, which would be attractive for, you know, a student who would want to come there, for a higher-abilitied student, to want to come there, that seemed to be the avenue that it went down. (Jerry)

The body seems to be displaced when the focus of a school moves from "hands-on" or vocational, to technical or computerized trades. When a school does away with "hands-on" trades, students who want to study these subjects must find a new home or a new course of study. "Higher-abilitied" seems to be how the school system refers to students who will likely score higher on the SAT and, therefore, raise the school's own report card. It seems like school reform increasingly is making schools unattractive for vocational teachers. Perhaps the body finds attractive, things the mind does not, and vice versa?

Levin, in The Body's Recollection of Being, explains how the mind has become displaced from the body:

> According to our tradition of metaphysics, the human body is not capable of thinking. Thinking takes place only in the 'mind' and this 'mind' is contingently located in the region of the head—which, for that reason, is often not counted as part of the human 'body.' We have tended to see an incurable split in our moral nature, a split which is repeated in every dimension of our being. The body, it seems, is inherently evil; it is a perpetual source of sin, moral weakness and limitation, cognitive error, perceptual illusion. When methodically separated from the body, the mind is essentially unpolluted and free of evil propensities. (Levin, 1985, p. 121)

It seems that vocational schools, by moving away from vocational and toward technical, have taken thinking away from the body and placed it, instead, in the mind. The balance between mind and

body no longer seems to be of concern. Computers seem to be considered an extension of the mind, and therefore, free from the evil tendencies of the body. Vocational teachers must see both mind and body as pure, because it takes both of these tools to create practical arts.

What is lost when the school system moves away from recognizing the intelligence of the hands and body and is only concerned about intelligence that can be measured on objective tests? It seems like vocational teachers must concentrate more on teaching mental, rather than bodily, intelligence if they are to have a place in re-formed schools. Likewise, students, who can think with their hands will have to hone and practice this way of knowing after school and on weekends.

Only the Mind Need Apply

James talks about the loss of place, both in school and in work, for these vocational students, who must now dwell in schools of technology:

> I think it's great for some kids who want the science aspect or want the technology part, but the poor kid that is not college-bound, that doesn't have a snowball's chance of getting into college, where does it leave them—it doesn't give them anyplace to go for a job. (James)

Several of the teachers with whom I spoke lamented over the loss of place for their vocational students—students who once used vocational education as a steppingstone into a career directly after finishing high school. Tom speaks about how a new credit required for graduation, technology education, is a poor substitute for traditional vocational education when it comes to getting a student prepared to earn a living:

> Because I guarantee you one thing, the vocational kids can go out there and get a job. Technical students, that Tech. Ed., because I taught it, how are these kids gonna go out there and build bridges with toothpicks? But to actually put torches and welding equipment and micrometers for the automotive and saws in carpenters' hands and the plumbers, the torches, you can't beat that! That's real skill there! They came out with Tech. Ed. because the money had to be shipped somewhere else. (Tom)

Vocational teachers, when they are not able to teach the hands as well as the mind, seem to lose their sense of purpose, and identity, as well as place, within a school. When "hands-on" trades are no longer seen to occupy valid places within a school, is the being of vocational teachers the

first to pick up on this disenfranchisement? Vocational teachers seems to express themselves through their work, and when such work is negated, part of their means of expression is also lost. Viewing wisdom as the sole providence of the mind seems to deny the great intelligence many people demonstrate via their bodies.

En-forcing School Reform

School systems seem to use their formal evaluation process to make sure that teachers are putting school reforms into practice. Vocational teachers are expected to demonstrate school reform when administrators come in to watch their class. When I ask Joe what school reforms most influenced his teaching, he says:

> I guess what influenced my teaching is the way they evaluate us. This new way of evaluating teachers, I think, in a sense is very foolish, but we have to play along with it, we have to do it. If I didn't have the mentor we had, that determined what I had to show the administrators, I don't know if I could have done it without, what she [did], and yet I shined. And I only consider myself an above-average teacher...but because I had the format there weren't stumbling blocks. (Joe)

Observing School Reform

When observations are used to judge how well vocational teachers are teaching under school reform, they must demonstrate proficiency in both their trade area and also in implementing the school's reform priorities.

Vocational teachers seems to be in a position of weakness in their lab, shop, or classroom during these observations—where someone has "power-over" them. Is their being silenced when vocational teachers become dependent upon the judgment of others to maintain their place under school reform? There seems to be even more of a disconnect between everyday life in their shop and life during an observation for vocational teachers and students.

Power-over. The fear of an observation seems to arise from a "power-over" relation, of which Kreisberg writes:

> Most prominent definitions of power share a common conception of power as a *relationship of domination, as power over.* Dominating relationships are

> Most prominent definitions of power share a common conception of power as a *relationship of domination, as power over.* Dominating relationships are characterized by inequality; situations in which one individual or group of individuals, in order to fulfill their own desires, have the ability to control the behavior, thoughts, and/or values of another individual or group of individuals. (Kreisberg, 1992, p. 36)

When observations of this kind are used to evaluate vocational teaching and to en-force school reform, vocational teachers who seem to be on shaky ground with school reform, appear to be in an even more tenuous place. Because vocational teachers must conform to the same format that is used to evaluate academic teachers, this seems to make them feel out of place in their shops and labs that are geared toward learning and practicing "hands on" skills.

Power-less tools. Because many vocational teachers perceive that observations are tools that administrators can use to displace them, they often read more into the negative implications and repercussions of observations than into their positive potential. Negative observations seem to set a tone, almost a self-fulfilling prophecy, that many vocational teachers find hard to silence. Tom describes how his observations seemed to foreshadow his displacement from the school:

> My first two-and-half years there, every observation went fine. And then when I gave her that problem, I didn't give her the problem, when I said to her about apologizing, that was it, I couldn't do nothing right. I couldn't do anything right. I almost felt like I was worthless. I'm not lying, I did. And I started telling myself, I know that I know how to teach. It's not me. She's pickin' on me. You get like a kid almost. And then, finally [I was gone]. (Tom)

Tom's place in the school seemed to change as a result of an incident with the principal in a faculty council meeting. Before that, all his observations had been fine, and after that he could not do anything right. Even though many vocational teachers do not see such observations as a valid measure of their value as a teacher and teaching ability, they still want to be recognized as valuable and still suffer when their observations are rated unsatisfactory.

For vocational teachers, losing their place in one school means that they will have to take whatever place they can get in another school, often teaching something that is not their expertise, something that is out of their "comfort zone." The observation process often makes vocational

partners in the education of students. Kreisberg writes about the divide that is created in power-over relationships:

> The power-over relationship cuts off human communication and creates barriers to human empathy and understanding. This separation and deafness to the experience of the powerless creates the space in which domination is exerted and thrives. (Kreisberg, 1992, p. 47)

School reform, and the imbalance of power between administrators and teachers, seems to leave many administrators fearing their own place and determined to implement reform despite, rather than together with, vocational teachers. Many vocational teachers, when being observed, seem to feel there is little empathy, or understanding from those who have the power over their place. In addition, almost all of the communication seems to be one-way, because many vocational teachers are either afraid to speak or their voices appear to fall on deaf ears. Dwelling in such a dominated space leaves vocational teachers longing for a place where their experience, voice, and expertise will be recognized, and where they will be made to feel like they belong.

True Belonging

The belonging of vocational teachers seems changed when their being is pushed rather than pulled into new places for building and dwelling. Instead of owning the land they work, vocational teachers seem to be occupants who farm someone else's land when school reform pushes them to it own ground.

O'Donohue writes that belonging is more than attachment, belonging is created from truth:

> The hunger to belong is not merely a desire to be attached to something. It is rather sensing that great transformation and discovery become possible when belonging is sheltered and true. Belonging is a call to integrity and creativity. (O'Donohue, 1999, p. 22)

Since the integrity and creativity of vocational teachers both seem threatened by school reform, belonging's call never seems to fully reach them. Instead, the voice of fear overshadows the call of being for too many vocational teachers. "Great transformation and discovery" under school reform might be possible for vocational teachers if they could experience sheltered and true belonging.

CHAPTER V: LEARNING HOW TO BUILD A NEW HOME AND DWELL IN RE-FORMED SCHOOLS

As vocational teachers learn how to make themselves at home, or sometimes to make a new home for themselves teaching under school reform, their destiny is understood, shaped, and defined by their being in this place, where all too often they have felt like a stranger instead of part of the family. Unless they can learn to feel at home under school reform, vocational teachers will remain homeless strangers on an endless journey—outsiders who focus more on what separates them from their academic brethren instead of on the unique gifts they bring to the table to share with their educational family. Perhaps school reform can begin a rebirth for vocational teachers, whereby they are leaders in showing how minds and bodies can work together to produce a deeper kind of learning for life.

In chapter five, I describe what I have discovered on this journey to understand the lived experience of teaching vocational education under school reform. In sharing the meanings that have been revealed to me by way of this journey, I hope to help others to learn and grow in their work with students and in their being.

Building a New Home

Sometimes the displacement brought by school reform moves vocational teachers to a better place. Three of the four vocational teachers who were displaced now seem to be happier in their new home. In their new schools these vocational teachers feel more respected and feel that someone cares about them and values their input. This openness is a vast change from the care-less atmosphere under which they dwelled in their old school. Tom enjoys working with a principal who supports and appreciates his teaching:

> She's [the principal] very supportive of what we do and I'm happy with her. She sat in on three of my observations. The very first one that I did, she was just overwhelmed. she said, "I learned so much." And then the second time she came she said, "it seems like every time I come here I learn more and more." (Tom)

Learn has roots in the Anglo-Saxon word, *læran*, "to teach" (Skeat, 1963, p. 288). When a principal supports what a vocational teacher is doing and demonstrates that even principals have something to learn, they are telling and showing vocational teachers that they care for them. Teaching vocational teachers that they are cared for is essential if school reform is to be implemented with care by vocational teachers. In Tom's old schools, the principals seemed to demonstrate a lack of caring and the message—spoken and unspoken—was that learning was a one-way street, from principal to teacher. If vocational teachers practiced such one-way learning, their students would not learn to master their trade—all of which requires listening and caring.

Building Together Instead of Working Under

If vocational teachers are to be successful in surviving and implementing school reform, they must be impelled to find and use their voices to dialogue about the changes that affect them and their students. Such a dialogue cannot take place where an undercurrent of fear threatens to wash away all who are not of like minds. Vocational teachers will begin to feel more at home when they enter into this clearing of openness, amidst the tangled maze of school reform, a clearing that connects them with their fellow teachers. Both site-based management and school reform seem to have more of a divide and conquer feel to them than they do a feeling of connection, whereby all vocational teachers are members of an educational family working toward the same ends as all other educators. When vocational teachers are displaced they become closed off to the possibilities that await them and their students and begin looking backward, instead of dwelling in the present, or working to build their dream home within the school. When "power-over" characterizes the world of vocational teachers, they must put most of their energy into defending their place, instead of building better schools with others in a world of "power-with." When vocational teachers experience "power-with," they are able to take a more active role in designing and implementing changes instead of being pawns moved at the will of school reform.

When I feel at home
school reform will come from me,
rather than to me.
--Reinsel, 2001

Teaching Others How to Reform

With their long experience in "hands-on" learning, vocational teachers can play an active and valuable role by showing academic teachers how to teach good lessons by working backward from the finished product (desired outcome) as they plan and teach:

> It seems like with every new superintendent, any new superintendent, there's always some sort of reform. In a lot of cases it seems to be a repetitive thing. Right now we're doing backward mapping which was called sequence chaining before. It seems like every five to ten years the same educational reforms come back into style. Backward mapping is the exact same thing we have done in vocational education all along. You give demonstrations, you show the kids, you let them show you, then the whole class does it and then they do it individually. And that's something we've been doing for years and years and years. Well now the academic classes are picking up on it and it's something new and exciting. We've had the advantage because we've had more "hands-on" stuff. (James)

Backward mapping brings together the head, the hands, and the heart—three essential ingredients for success in every vocational education class. Decades of experience have given James a very wide view of reform, a perspective that allows him to recognize the familiar things and the areas where vocational teachers are leaders—such as how "hands-on" learning is a great way for students to learn—regardless of the subject area. James is proud of how his mastery of teaching using backward mapping led to having his lesson being chosen as a model for a big part of the county—both academic and vocational.

When vocational teachers are recognized for their teaching—not just when they put on banquets or remodel the school—they are seen in a new light personally, by other teachers, and by their students. James seems to be saying that, for the most part, once he is in the kitchen with his students, school reform has not changed how he teaches his students to be culinary artists. As a veteran vocational teacher, James seems to have established his teaching style before the waves of reform could change the nature of his being with students.

Ignored by School Reform

Why did most of my co-researchers have such a hard time explaining the term school reform? Is it because there is a vast difference between paper and practice, or perhaps they are just not schooled in the latest educational jargon because they have to "walk the walk" and not "talk the talk?" Could it also be that school reform, like schools in general, often seems to forget about vocational education because it does not attract the "best" students and garner much positive publicity?

The experience of seeing reforms come and go, like the ocean's tides or seasons of the year, seem to give Jerry the patience to endure reforms that often seem to ignore the reality that vocational teachers and students experience each day. Instead of making waves, Jerry chooses to hope that his ideas, students, and mission will one day come back into favor:

> It [school reform] seems to go in circles. They'll [reformers] come back around to something else. Everything now is all this high tech stuff, which is good, but here's this poor kid that needs these skills and lower ability kids—maybe they need skills to get a job and they're not gonna have em. I don't know how many years but it'll come back around again. Some things that seem crazy, I think well, just ride this out, it'll pass too [laughs] you know. (Jerry)

An Im-moral Side of School Reform

Jerry has quietly suffered displacement within his school and he seems to have distanced himself from school reform. Perhaps this detachment is a survival mechanism that has enabled him to teach business education for 30 years. Jerry and many other vocational teachers have silently walked the journey to school reform because they did not feel comfortable expressing their impressions of the journey to those who oversaw their expedition. Underneath this laissez-faire exterior, lie buried the many strong feelings and experiences that Jerry has accumulated on his long journey—valuable stories and clues for future trekkers, and for those who study the effects and the effectiveness of school reform.

Most vocational teachers seem to feel like victims of school reform who have been damaged

by the changes to schools, yet have no recourse but to sit and take it. This "victim mentality" does not seem to arise from vocational teachers not caring, but more because they are afraid and feel powerless to influence the events that shape their dwelling in schools. Huebner seems to put his finger on why most vocational teachers are passive in the face of the moral issues of school reform:

> Teachers do not fail to address the moral and ethical issues of teaching because they lack moral sensitivity, concern, or commitment. But this concern is deeply buried under the hard shell teachers develop to protect themselves in nonsupportive environments. (Huebner, 1996, p. 1)

Underneath the "hard shell" that covers the many vocational teachers who have been displaced by school reform, lies caring teachers who are committed to their mission of helping students to learn a vocational trade and to grow into productive citizens. For vocational teachers to move from passive victims of school reform to empowered partners in school reform, they need to move from silence to speaking their own voice. The feelings of vocational teachers are an unknown and un-utilized asset in the effort to re-form schools. Perhaps this is because there is no place and time for vocational teachers to share their feelings and stories about school reform. The silence among vocational teachers occurs because they are afraid that if they speak out they will not have a place in the school, afraid that they will lose the marginal place they now occupy.

Perhaps breaking their silence is the only way that vocational teachers can regain the confidence that comes with truly speaking your heart, allowing your inner voice to share itself with the outside world. By speaking up for themselves and their students, vocational teachers give voice to their mission and to their profession. Instead of allowing themselves to become hostages of fear, vocational teachers can experience the liberation and respect, of themselves and of others, that comes when one speaks out for a cause one believes in.

Reflecting upon the Stories of School Reform

Sharing stories will not only help vocational teachers to feel less alone, but also it is a way for them to begin imagining and talking about a better future under reform. There is power in these

stories of teaching vocational education under school reform. It is a power that connects vocational teachers and helps them to reflect upon past experiences and the layers of meaning that seem to be uncovered when these experiences are discussed.

It seems that listening to and reflecting upon questions that come from our own voice and being is something vocational teachers must do before moving into the wider circle of their vocational colleagues, and to the school at large. Once we hear or write and reflect upon our own stories, we can more thoughtfully listen to those of other vocational teachers. By writing down their lived experiences under school reform, vocational teachers can reflect upon experiences that later can be given voice and shared with colleagues. When vocational teachers are able to discuss issues they care about, they are able to care for themselves and their students better.

The Power to Transform

When vocational teachers listen to and examine their own memories of teaching under school reform, and also the stories of their colleagues, they can put the pain to good use by understanding how it has shaped them into who they are. Everyday as vocational teachers, we help our students to overcome hurdles, both big and small. By acknowledging our own hurdles with school reform and sharing them with colleagues, and sometimes even with students, we show them ways of being, and we share our humanity. Perhaps it is when the embers of pain are left to smolder, untouched and unexamined, instead of being turned over and exposed to the light, that nothing productive comes of the grief experienced by vocational teachers as they teach under school reform.

Co-agents of Reform

For both school reform and vocational teachers to be successful, they must find a way to draw strength from each other instead. This way of being calls for using what Kreisberg refers to as *power-with*, instead of *power-over*, which has been school reform's modus operandi for much too long:

> *Power with* is manifest in *relationships of co-agency*. These relationships are characterized by people finding ways to satisfy their desires and to fulfill their interests without imposing on one another. The relationship of co-agency is one in which there is equality: situations in which individuals and groups fulfill their desires by acting together. It is jointly developing capacity. The possibility for *power with* lies in the reality of human interconnections within communities. (Kreisberg, 1992, pp. 85-86)

For this atmosphere of "power-with" to happen under school reform, vocational teachers must find, listen, and understand both their own voices and those of their educational colleagues. Without letting others know where they stand, vocational teachers are more easily moved to a spot that is not conducive to dwelling, building, and fulfilling their sense of mission. When vocational teachers isolate themselves from others, even their fellow vocational teachers, school reform begins to feel like a burden that can never be moved or removed.

Critically Oriented Action Research

According to Van Manen, phenomenology is more than just a descriptive method:

> And so to become more thoughtfully or attentively aware of aspects of human life which hitherto were merely glossed over or taken-for-granted will more likely bring us to the edge of speaking up, speaking out, or decisively acting in social situations that ask for such action. (1990, p. 154)

Having used phenomenology to study the lived experiences of vocational teachers, I am now in a position to speak up to others about their concerns with regard to school reform. Sharing my work with other vocational teachers will be my first priority in hopes that hearing the voices of others who are living with school reform will help them to understand, reflect, and to hear more clearly their own voices. Also, I hope to help vocational teachers to work together to find a better place under school reform by recognizing and speaking with a collective voice.

I hope to use my understanding of school reform from the perspective of a vocational teacher to share this voice with policy makers and administrators so that schools may become better places for both vocational teachers and vocational students. Vocational teachers are a fragile group whose existence is threatened by school reform. Perhaps by sharing my research with others in the

educational and business communities, I can help vocational teachers and students to feel more at home in our changing schools.

Rediscovering my Own Voice

Perhaps the biggest thing I take from this journey is finding and trusting my own voice. I hope that my fellow vocational teachers can also find, trust, and share their own voices as they teach under reform. May vocational teachers grasp the opportunity to re-form, but also to re-create schools in ways that care for the minds, bodies, and hearts of both students and teachers.

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