

Teachers as Historical Participants: Queens, New York, September 11, 2001

Paper presented at the College and University Faculty Assembly of the National Council for the
Social Studies
Baltimore, Maryland
November 18, 2004

Beverly Milner (Lee) Bisland, Assistant Professor
Elementary and Early Childhood Education Department
Queens College of the City University of New York
65-30 Kissena Boulevard
Flushing, New York 11367-1597

bbisland@qc1.qc.edu

There is an accumulating body of knowledge about September 11th in New York City. This knowledge comes particularly from those individuals directly involved in the event, such as members of the New York City fire and police departments, emergency workers, office workers in the World Trade Center and others. Unlike the Sunday attack on Pearl Harbor, a comparison that is sometimes used with the attacks on the World Trade Center, Tuesday September 11th was a work day. Elementary school teachers throughout the New York City public schools were in school at the time of the attacks. The attack on the north tower occurred 15 minutes after their work day began at 8:30. Teachers were bringing their students up to their classrooms from outside and beginning the school day. This study tells the stories of one group of elementary teachers on that day. These teachers were located primarily in Queens, New York.

Purpose of the Study

There are three objectives for this study. The first objective is to include the voices of elementary teachers, primarily women, in the historical narrative of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. Hopefully, this inclusion will encourage educators, and social studies educators in particular, to use personal accounts and narratives in the study of historical events. History is always somebody's story and one historical event may be viewed from a variety of perspectives. By using the voices of individuals, who were part of an event or witnessed it, teachers encourage students to understand that they are part of history and that their voice and perspective is part of the historical record (Levstik & Barton, 2001).

The second objective is to further the discussion of teachers as public servants who are essential to the maintenance of the democratic state (Blacker, 2002; Lipsky, 1980). This discussion demonstrates how teachers' actions on this day show the essential qualities of public service.

The third objective is to focus on the personal and emotional responses of teachers to the attacks and the effect these responses had on their actions in the classroom. This focus furthers research on the emotions of teachers and the connections between personal emotions and classroom decision making..

This study is the first part of a larger study that compares the responses and decisions of teachers to the responses and decisions of student teachers and individuals outside of the classroom, who were located not only in Queens but on Long Island and in Manhattan, including lower Manhattan and the World Trade Center itself.

Background

Included in the accumulating body of knowledge about September 11, 2001 are a large scale study of New York City school children in the aftermath of the attacks (Goodnough, 2002; New York City Board of Education, 2002), a survey of the reactions of Long Island and Queens residents to the attacks (Huddy et al, 2002), and anecdotal accounts from schools located in lower Manhattan, the site of the World Trade Center (Eldridge, 2002; Feldman, 2001; Lehmuller & Switzer, 2002).

This study adds to the accumulating body of knowledge. It is based on journals written by eighteen teachers who function as a representative example of elementary teachers in the New York City schools located outside of the immediate danger zone of lower Manhattan on September 11, 2001. Classrooms are complex places under ordinary circumstances. Decisions are often made quickly with little or incomplete information (Good & Brophy, 2000; Jackson, 1968). This complexity and incomplete information were magnified on September 11. This study focuses on elementary classrooms which were primarily in Queens, New York. Queens is across the East River and northeast of lower Manhattan and was therefore outside the immediate danger zone of the World Trade Center. Many of the respondents however were close enough to the unfolding tragedy to see the resulting fire and billowing smoke from the attacks or hear the sirens and vehicular noise that was part of the massive rescue operation mounted in response to the attacks.

A prominent social studies educator said in 1939 that “society cannot be seen clearly by anyone in the midst of it. The soldier in the trenches sees only what happens within eyesight and understands only a fraction of that. He does not see the battle or the war” (Krey, p.74). This lack of access to information is often called “the fog of war” (Bowden, 2003). While much of the nation watched the unfolding horror of the attacks on television, teachers in the elementary schools of Queens had limited access to the same images and information. Respondents reported that they did not have televisions or radios in their classrooms. When the towers collapsed cell phone transmitters collapsed with them as well as television and radio transmitters, so this possible access to information was cut off as well. When teachers received information about the attacks, the information was incomplete and confusing and their access to radios or televisions was either in the faculty room or the library and they could not leave their classrooms to watch. Many of the teachers had family or close friends that worked in Manhattan. It is a phenomenon of big cities like New York that individuals know that friends and family work “downtown” or “in mid-town”, but do not know the exact street address or building. Suddenly, on September 11th, this became very crucial information.

Although it is now known that there was no danger to Queens, New York from the terrorist attacks, it was not known at the time. The larger elementary schools in Queens are often buildings with five stories. One respondent on the fifth floor of a school north of John F. Kennedy airport could clearly see the burning towers from her fifth grade classroom windows and did not know whether or not the airport was a target. Another teacher on the fourth floor of a school on the far eastern border of Queens and Long Island’s Nassau County could clearly see the billowing smoke from his second grade classroom and hear the calliope of sirens outside his windows. Not only does it appear that exact information as to what was actually happening was limited, but there was no way of knowing what might happen next. Teachers struggled with their own emotions and made curriculum and instructional decisions in a climate of potential danger and unknowns.

Disasters are divided into three distinct categories: natural disasters, technological disasters and mass violence. The latter two are both caused by humans, but mass violence has the further element of

intention (Norris et al, 2002; Norris, Friedman & Watson, 2002). The attacks on the World Trade Center fall into the last category. In a study of Queens and Long Island in which the personal threat of terrorism by individuals in the geographic area of the attack on the World Trade Center was compared to the national threat, it was found that personal threat was far more likely to illicit strong emotional reactions than national threat (Huddy et al, 2002). Mental health professionals have identified the reactions to this type of personal threat or trauma as: shock, anger, grief and fear. (Harvard Mental Health Letter, January,2002; Padgett, 2002). Each of the respondents expressed one or more of these emotions in varying degrees as information about the attacks became available to them. The educational research about the effect of personal emotions of this type on teachers and their classroom decisions is limited, however (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003).

Each teacher had a classroom full of children. They had to decide what to say and what not to say to the children in their charge. How many of the children in their classrooms had family members working in the World Trade Center was unknown. Often children had no specific information, other than that their parents worked in Manhattan. In some instances, building administrators made the decision whether to discuss what was happening or not. In other instances the decision was left up to the classroom teacher. In addition, in the elementary schools of Queens, parents began to come in a steady stream to pick up their children. Teachers then confronted the questions of other students, who were not being picked up, as to why others were leaving and they were not. In some instances, there were only two or three children left in classrooms by the end of the school day at 3:00 PM.

Teachers in the public schools are included among the public servants essential to the maintenance of a democratic society (Blacker, 2002; Lipsky, 1980). For most ordinary citizens these public servants, which include police, firefighters and others, are the face of the democratic state. These are the public servants they typically encounter as they go about their everyday lives. These public servants become for the ordinary citizen the democratic state's "face and voice, its triumphs and failures, its heroes and villains" (Blacker, 2002, p.6). Inherent in public service is "a moral nobility" (Blacker, 2002, p.6) that came to the forefront on September 11th:

. . . in the immediate aftermath of events, in those first few hours of horror and confusion teachers were left to comfort and explain . . . in the beginning, teachers stood, often alone and with no clear guidelines and they taught: through their words, their actions, their interpretations, and their own feelings of fear, anger and sorrow (Dolby & Burbules, 2002, p.6).

The Response Journals

This study is based on journals written by fifteen teachers in elementary classrooms in Queens, New York and three teachers in Nassau County on Long Island which is immediately east of Queens County. The journals are personal histories of each individual's actions, thoughts and feelings from the time they woke up on September 11 until they went to sleep that night

The respondents were asked to follow a general format in the journals. They were asked to think in terms of one or two hour blocks of time from when they got up on Tuesday, September 11 until they went to bed that night. They were to record their actions, their thoughts and feelings. Most of the journals are from three to five pages long and contain varying degrees of detail.

The journals were written in February 2002. The larger study includes not only the eighteen teachers but also all the students in three graduate level elementary education methods courses. Although the ability to recall after this lapse of time is a concern in ordinary circumstances, events that are "highly vivid, widely reported in the news, involuntary, responsible for a large number of deaths and unusual" (Huddy et al, 2002, p. 487) remain more available in memory (Lichtenstein et al, 1978; Thaler, 1983). The class used for this study consisted primarily of teachers who were in elementary classrooms in Queens on September 11 and attending graduate school at night. A second class consisted of student's taking methods courses in conjunction with student teaching in elementary schools in Queens on September 11. A third class consisted of students working primarily outside of education on September 11, who are attending graduate school at night to obtain teaching certification. For the purposes of this study only the journals of the eighteen teachers are used. This study is the first part of a longer study that will include a comparison of those individuals outside of schools and those student teachers in schools without classroom decision making responsibilities to teachers in classrooms on September 11th.

The pool of respondents reflects the following numbers, gender and location:

Male	4	Female	14	Total	18
Queens	3	Queens	12	Total	15
Long Island	1	Long Island	2	Total	3

Evaluation of the Response Journals

An evaluation of the response journals is based on the following guiding questions:

- How did each teacher learn about the attacks?
- How did each teacher react to the knowledge of the attacks?
- How did each teacher make curriculum and instructional decisions in the aftermath of the knowledge of the attacks?

The response journals were first read to determine common themes based on the guiding questions. This reading led to the establishment of initial general categories; how each teacher first heard about the attacks, their personal responses and their professional responses. Similarities and differences in the responses under each general category were compared. Based on these comparisons the categories were developed and refined to include; 1)teacher’s gender, 2)location of school, 3)grade level of teacher’s classroom, 4)World Trade Center in sight from the school 5)source of the initial knowledge of the attacks 6)personal response to the initial knowledge and 7)professional response to the knowledge. Further elaboration of existing categories occurred as necessary (See Charts I – VIII). This repetition of coding, comparing and refining (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) led to further information on the personal and professional responses of teachers under severe emotional stress.

Findings

September 11, 2001 in New York City was a bright, clear day with a deep and seemingly endless blue sky. Several of the teachers began their journals commenting on the beauty of the day:

At about 7:00 that morning, I was getting ready for work. I looked out my sixth floor apartment window and saw nothing but endless blue sky. It started out as a gorgeous day. There wasn’t a cloud in sight. The visibility was endless. The temperature was perfect for late summer. On very clear days, I can see the Empire State Building from my apartment window; this was one of them. I remember walking outside, looking up at the sky and saying to myself “what a beautiful day.” (Teacher 6)

As I walked out of my house, the sun shone in the clear, blue sky. It's not just another day though, it's my (wedding) anniversary (Teacher 7)

And the view! Today is an absolutely perfect day. Blue skies, crisp air and a view of the skyline. I'm so lucky to have such a beautiful, unobstructed scene right outside my (classroom) window (Teacher 8)

One third of the teachers (n=6) could see the skyline of lower Manhattan from the upper floors of their schools. Whether the schools were on the eastern border of Queens and Nassau County, in the southeastern part of the borough north of John F. Kennedy airport or in the center of the borough, the clarity of the day made it possible to see the burning towers. Seeing the billowing smoke did not mean, however, that it was easy to understand what was happening.

This account is from a fifth grade classroom on the fifth floor of a school north of Kennedy airport:

Black smoke was pouring from the tower on the left. Christopher (a student) told the class that a plane flew into it. I assured the class that it was an accident and to continue working. No one did though and we were all watching when the second plane hit. (Teacher 8)

This account is from a fourth grade teacher in the middle of Queens. Her class is across the hall from classrooms with a clear view of Manhattan to the west:

. . . I have to look out the classroom windows across the hall . . . I could not believe it! I ran right over and saw it with my own eyes. A cloud of smoke blocked the towers. I didn't want to believe it. (Teacher 4)

Also in the center of Queens, this teacher went to look out of upper floor windows while his students were in the gymnasium:

When I approached the window (on the other side of the school from my classroom) I could not believe my eyes and what I saw. There was smoke billowing out of two buildings, and I asked another teacher whose room I entered to witness the crash "what happened?" . . . I tried to understand what I was witnessing. (Teacher 14)

Seventy eight percent of the teachers (n=13) said that they found out about the World Trade Center attacks when another teacher came into their classroom and told them, always outside of the hearing of students.

. . . a young ESL teacher knocked on the door and asked to speak with me in the hall. Unsure of her name I go into the hall expecting to talk about a few students in the class, when she informs me that . . . a plane has crashed into the World Trade Center (Teacher 5)

Another teacher was told by a co-worker whose relatives later exited the World Trade Center safely:

There was some commotion in the hall, so I had the children begin their journal entries as I went out to find out. My friend who teaches the class across the hall was in a panic. I couldn't quite understand what she was talking about. I remember her saying "They hit the Twin Towers . . . the building collapsed . . . the whole thing supposedly . . . it came down . . . my mom, dad, brothers . . . oh my God . . . everyone is there . . ." At that point, I knew I had to calm her down, although I still didn't understand what was going on. Who hit the Twin Towers? What does she mean the building came down? (Teacher 7)

Another teacher's husband was a New York City firefighter:

I still have such a vivid memory of when the teacher who I was working with directed me to the hallway. She had such a disturbed look on her face. She asked me "where does your husband work"? With that question I began to panic, because he is a New York City Firefighter and he just went back to work on Monday night. I told the teacher "he works in Queens, why"? She then said "there has been an accident and the twin towers are on fire, they think it is terrorists so we have to keep all doors shut" (Teacher 12).

Teacher 12 found out later that her husband was still in his Queens firehouse and was not sent to lower Manhattan during the morning of September 11.

Four of the teachers heard about the attacks through sources other than school personnel. One teacher found out when his wife called him on his cell phone and one teacher saw the burning towers from her classroom window. Two of the teachers listened to the radio during the attacks themselves.

A nursery school teacher's school did not start until 9:30 and she ran some errands before arriving at school. Sitting in her car in a shopping center, she was told by a stranger who came to her window. She turned on her car radio to hear an account of the attacks. A teacher on Long Island was on a field trip with her students and heard about the attacks on the radio of the school van. Although these two teachers did not have access to the television images that much of the United States and the world watched, they at least had an account of what was happening. The teachers in this study who were located in elementary schools did not have the same audio information from radio or visual information from television. Most of the teachers did not know the full extent of the tragedy until after both towers had fallen. Some did not see the images until they arrived home late in the afternoon.

One teacher left school at 3 PM and made her way home, only then did she know all that had transpired that morning:

I didn't even know that the second tower fell until I got home and watched the attack caught on camera. (Teacher 1)

Another teacher did not know the full impact of the attacks until she turned on her car radio on the long ride home. All of the stations were using a news format:

I was on my way home expecting to have to turn on the news channel (an all news station) to hear what was going on. To my surprise every station was the news, I knew at this point that this was really bad. (Teacher 2)

After making her way slowly home by bus and subway, another teacher finally saw the images:

When I arrived home, I immediately turned on the television and radio. There weren't many details but I remained glued to the TV . . . and finally the impact and significance of what had occurred sank in. (Teacher 11)

Another teacher only had to walk around the corner to go home after school:

As soon as I got home I turned on the television and saw for the first time what actually had happened . . . I continued to watch the television with my family until I went to bed, continually saying "I can't believe this happened" (Teacher 5)

For many of the teachers in this study the earliest they heard radio reports or saw television images was at 10:30 A.M. after both attacks occurred and both towers collapsed. Two teachers (#3 and #16) had a radio in their room which they turned on during their free time when the children were not there. Some of the teachers went to the faculty room or library to hear radio or watch television:

Then at 12:00 it was time for my lunch and I went to the faculty room. In there was a TV (Teacher 12)

Some of the teachers left their schools during their lunch break in order to gain access to television:

I had to go out, leave the building . . . As I was walking, I looked up at the television screen at the barbershop. I couldn't believe my eyes . . . it felt like I was watching a movie. (Teacher 7)

At 11:30 I went home for lunch and immediately turned on the TV (Teacher 18)

I left school on my lunch break to go to a co-worker's home to see the news. It looked like a movie. (Teacher 9)

The teachers' access to information was limited. Because they had little access to the local and national media, it was difficult to understand the nature and extent of the attacks.

The teachers had strong reactions when they learned of the attacks. Although there was concern about the threat to the nation, the strongest reactions were to the personal threat to their own family and friends and the families of their students. Among the total reports of reactions to personal threat (n=35) in the response journals, the highest percentage (34%) (n=12) is expressions of fear and the next highest percentage (31%)(n=11) is expressions of shock. Expressions of grief (20%)(n=7) and anger (6%)(n=2) were not as numerous as fear and shock.

Some of the teachers expressing fear said:

. . . my wife and father both work in Manhattan . . . I must say that at this time I was feeling very anxious, neither my father or wife worked in the Twin Towers but I still wanted to speak with them and make sure they were o.k. (Teacher16)

My heart began to race, as I was overwhelmed with anxiety. I knew many people working in New York City, including my best friend Kevin. One of my childhood friends, Brad, was attending dental school in the city as well. I didn't know whether or not they were near the attack. (Teacher 18)

She (another teacher) asked me "where does your husband work"? With that question I began to panic, because he is a New York City Firefighter and he had just gone back to work on Monday night (Teacher 12)

Some of the teachers expressing shock said:

I was numb. I couldn't really grasp the magnitude of what was going on (Teacher 17)

She (another teacher) then said, "They're saying that it may not have been an accident!" I did not respond verbally, because I was shocked to have heard that! (Teacher 13)

. . . the same teacher came around again telling us that a second plane crashed into the towers and that it is terrorist related. I was just in mere shock. I felt almost unaffected, because it didn't seem like my reality at the time. (Teacher 5)

One of the teachers expressing grief said:

I finally got through to someone and he tried to prepare me for the worst. He was positive that our friends had been in the buildings when they fell . . .my phone began to ring. My friends I thought. It was about them. They had made it out . . . I broke down in tears because I was so close to losing them (Teacher 3)

The nursery school teacher who was shopping before the beginning of school recounts:

I went to the other end of the shopping center to go to the supermarket. The only thing I kept thinking was that I was grateful my brother no longer worked at the World Trade Center. As I walked into the store I couldn't control myself. I burst into tears. It was a feeling of total disbelief. (Teacher 10)

Few of the teachers expressed anger. One who did said:

Knowing about (my friends in Manhattan and that they were safe) made me feel so incredibly relieved yet at the same time watching the news made me feel enraged. (Teacher 18)

As each of these teachers struggled with their personal reactions and responses, they also needed to make classroom decisions. One of the first concerns was whether any of the students' parents were working in the World Trade Center. Teachers indicated that none of their students knew whether their parents were in the World Trade Center or not. Some of the teachers were asked to find out. A third grade teacher said:

. . . we were informed to ask the students if they knew if their parents worked at the World Trade Center. No one in my class knew exactly where their parents worked in the city. I didn't let the kids know that anything was wrong. I made it seem like a game. How many of you know where your parents work? How many of your parents work in Manhattan? How many of them work at the World Trade Center or Twin Towers? They were all eager to tell me where their parents work or what their parents do, but none of them said my father or mother works at the World Trade Center. (Teacher 5)

A fourth grade teacher leaving her class with another teacher while she went on a preparation period said:

But before I left we asked if any of our students had parents that worked downtown. Many of them were unsure. One student looked worried. I asked her what she was thinking. She asked me if her mom was ok because she worked in Jamaica. I immediately went over to our New York map and showed her where Jamaica is in relation to the crash (Jamaica is in Queens) and assured her that she was definitely fine. (Teacher 4)

For half of the teachers, the principal gave instructions about the information they should give to the students (50%) (n=9). The other half made the decisions on their own (50%) (n=9). The principals who informed the students directly of the attacks either used the public address system or used an assembly (17%) (n=3). Other principals instructed teachers not to say anything to their students about the attacks (29%) (n=5). In no instance did the principal give instructions that teachers were to make the decisions as they thought best. When teachers made their own decisions (50%) (n=9), it was without directions from principals.

A fourth grade teacher in Long Island's Nassau County describes an assembly called by the principal:

Then at 2:00 the principal decided that she would have an assembly for the upper grades to inform them gently. We were all nervous about this as we walked to the auditorium. The principal told the children in a direct way of what happened without trying to scare them. She wanted them to be aware that they were not to get off the bus if their parents weren't there to pick them up. (Teacher 12)

A fourth grade teacher in Queens gave the following account:

The principal came on the loud speaker. She told the school that there is not much information, but there was a horrible act on our country. Bad people crashed planes into the twin towers. But she assured the school that we are safe and there is no need to worry. (Teacher 4)

Some principals directed teachers not to inform the students of the attacks. Some teachers had difficulty following out these directions for two reasons. First, it necessitated misinforming students and second, so many parents came into the schools to pick up their children that the students left behind began to ask questions:

A fifth grade teacher in Queens describes her school at 10:30 A.M.:

Children were leaving the building left and right (as their parents picked them up). We didn't discuss anything with the children. They were very young and weren't really aware of anything out of the ordinary. Most importantly our principal didn't want us to discuss this attack with any of the children. (Teacher 1)

A second grade teacher in Queens offers the following description:

By this time at about 10:45 there were many parents that had arrived at the school because they were very concerned and wanted to take their children home. This school has about 1400 students so it was not going to be so easy to go and get all of their children so quickly. . . Eventually the school had to have the parent's wait in the auditorium and school aides and teachers would go and get the children from classrooms and bring them downstairs to the auditorium . . . I believe that the school did a good job of handling the situation and tried to accommodate each and every parent . . . We were not allowed to tell the children about what was happening and to be honest with you it was almost impossible to stay in that room and teach the children. After picking the children up from lunch we went back to the classroom but it was almost impossible to do any work with them . . . although the children did not know what happened they were able to tell that something was wrong because their classmates continued to leave all day. (Teacher 16)

A fifth grade teacher in Queens had difficulty with the incorrect answers she had to give to students because of her principal's instructions:

I . . . was instructed not to tell the students what was going on. So I taught math and let them do art. Two kids asked me if something was wrong. They were tipped off by some sixth graders who found out. I told them if I knew something I would tell them. I hated lying to them . . . By that time, a lot of parents had already picked up their kids. The others asked, “Why are so many kids getting picked up?” I responded, “It’s such a nice day out, maybe they want to go out as a family.” It was the only excuse I could come up with. (Teacher 9)

Of the teachers who made their own decision to explain to students (28%) (n=5), only one of the five taught a primary grade. Her children were in the second grade. She had not yet found out that her brother, who worked in lower Manhattan, or her other brother and father, who worked in mid-town Manhattan, were safe.

(Returning to her classroom after lunch) They were staring at me with a frightened look in their eyes. We went into our classroom and I knew we had to have a conversation about it. They were raising their hands, waiting patiently for me to pick on them. “They told us that a bad man made the plane fall on the buildings . . . it happened in Manhattan and my mommy works there . . . I hope she’s okay.” “Why didn’t our parents come to pick us up?” And so I began to tell them that something very bad happened, but we don’t know exactly who did it. I also reassured them that it’s possible that some of their parents may be stuck in the city, since cars were not allowed in or out of the city. The traffic is also very bad and people cannot use their cell phones to get in touch with each other. I asked them what they would like to do. Some wanted to draw a picture, others wanted to write a card or a poem for the people who are special in their lives, and some wanted to share their journal entry from that morning because it was “happy”. I hugged each one and didn’t say much after that . . . neither did they. (Teacher 7)

An intermediate grade teacher who could see the rising smoke of the fallen towers from his school made the following decision. He did not know yet that his father-in-law, who worked in one of the Twin Towers, was safe.

I retrieved my students and explained to them what was happening, and then let them look out the classroom window. They could not understand what this was all about. I told them to sit down and we had a discussion about the word terrorism. We were still unsure at the time so I told them it still could be an accident but I knew it was unlikely. After a long talk I tried to get back to work. We went about our normal day. I tried to keep the students busy. (Teacher 14)

Another teacher fought her own fears for her fiancé who worked in Manhattan and explained to her students:

I began to panic on the inside. I tried to keep it together on the outside. I think I knew that my fiancé did not work in the World Trade Center . . . However, I didn’t know where he was, on the train or at work. I was really freaking out. I was shaking and nervous I couldn’t call him, my cell phone had no signal.

I also knew that some of my children had parents that worked in Manhattan, if I lost it then they would lose it. I also knew that the children on the other side of the hallway saw the Twin

Towers fall. I had to tell my children something, so I told them that a plane had crashed into a building in Manhattan and that everything was going to be ok. I had to ease their curiosity and comfort their fears. (Teacher 2)

One teacher who had listened to the radio and knew her friends who worked in the World Trade Center were safe said:

I used the day to add a new word to their vocabulary: terrorism. I also taught them about tolerance and things of that nature. (Teacher 3)

Two teachers in the primary grades did not tell their students about the attacks. (67%) (n=2)

One teacher of an intermediate class, out of five teachers who made their own decisions, said that she chose not to discuss the attacks:

At mid-day I went to pick up the class from lunch. I noticed that about three children were missing. It turned out that these children were picked up during lunch. Now that I was aware of what had gone on, I strongly felt that I did not want to alarm the children that were still with me in school. I did not feel that I should say anything regarding the event, because they might have gotten scared. They would probably have questioned why they weren't picked up. So, I chose not to say a thing . . . Surprisingly, during the afternoon the children did not ask why so many children were being picked up. (Teacher 13)

Teachers who began the day with twenty-five to thirty students ended the day with less than ten, as parents continued to pick up their children and take them home. Only after their students were safely on their way home did teachers who had children of their own, pick them up from school:

When I left work I had twenty minutes to spare before my children got out of school three blocks away. I couldn't wait to get them and bring them home. I took my kids home . . . (Teacher 10)

As the teachers made their way home from school either in private vehicles or by public transportation they found a very different city from the one they saw that morning.

. . . how was I getting home? (A bridge) was closed and so was (a major parkway). I had no way of getting home. I had to . . . take the streets home. It took me two hours to get home. It normally takes me fifteen minutes. All I could think about was how lucky I was to be alive . . . (Teacher 9)

I clocked out, and walked out of the building. There was not a sound. Cars seemed to be on pause. Traffic was slow. It was such a weird feeling, so eerie. There were many police cars around. I needed to get on a bus but that street was closed . . . I . . . began walking towards the train . . . when I recognized a teacher that I worked with three summers ago . . . She asked me where I was going and offered me a ride. (Teacher 13)

I wondered how I was going to get home, but discovered that some buses and trains in Queens were operating. Everywhere in the streets, on the bus, and on the train, the atmosphere was cautious and tense. People moved about quietly. I, too, traveled home quietly, reflecting on the traumatic events of this day. As I waited on the elevated train platform (my final leg home), I could see and smell smoke rising from the area where the World Trade Center once stood. This was especially poignant. Everything felt surreal . . . (Teacher 11)

Discussion

Response journals similar to the ones used in this study are a way to establish the historical record. Educators, and social studies educators in particular, can help students understand that it is through the voices and stories of individuals who participate in or witness events that historians build the historical record of that event (Levstik and Barton, 2001; H.White, 1980; M.White, 1965). Students should be encouraged to understand that they are also participants and part of the understanding of an historical event such as September 11, 2001. For the rest of their lives they will be asked where they were on September 11th, how they heard about the attacks, what they felt and what action they took. Just as the World War II generation was asked about Pearl Harbor, and the 1960s generation was asked about the assassination of John F Kennedy, they will be asked about the terrorist attacks on the United States. Understanding their own part in history will lead to an understanding that narrative history is more than the history found in textbooks. September 11, 2001 is not only our nation's and the world's history, it is their own history. All of history is constructed from the experiences and actions of individuals (Brophy and Van Sledwright, 1997; Levstik and Pappas, 1992).

Using teachers to tell the story of September 11 in New York City goes beyond a general selection of individuals who experienced the event at close range. Teachers are a particular group of civil servants. Their perspectives and commitments set them apart from the many other individuals in a variety of occupations who were in metropolitan New York on September 11th. Similar to firefighters, police officers, emergency workers and others; their profession involves a commitment that transcends their own individual emotions and needs. Their profession charges them with the care and development of students whose needs they are asked to put above their own needs. That commitment, what Blacker (2002) calls "a moral nobility" was evident in the actions of the teachers in this study on September 11th. That

commitment is seen even more dramatically among teachers in schools in the area adjacent to the World Trade Center. They led their students to safety in other schools away from the area of the attacks, even as the World Trade Center burned above them (Lehmuller and Switzer, 2002).

Although they were extremely concerned about their own families, even distraught, none of the journals indicated that a teacher considered leaving their students and going home. All stayed until the end of the school day or until all of their students were safely on their way home. Then they went to their own children and families. Through these actions they demonstrated under extraordinary conditions the nature of the teaching profession, which caused them to put aside their personal feelings in order to fulfill their professional responsibility. The journals show that they took these actions without making a conscious decision to stay with their students or leave to go to their own friends and family.

Although some of the teachers expressed concern for what was happening to the nation, their strongest emotions were personal and concerned family and friends located in Manhattan during the attacks. Most individuals in the greater metropolitan area of New York City had some connection with at least one of the thousands of people working in the World Trade Center on September 11th. They either personally knew someone or knew someone through another person. Thousands of people escaped from the World Trade Center unharmed. Others did not. This personal connection to people working in the World Trade Center and its surrounding area was evident in the teachers' reactions which show shock, grief, anger and fear. In their journals, however, the teachers speak of controlling themselves and staying calm for the sake of the children. As one teacher said "What will they do if I lose it?" (Teacher 2)

These statements of controlling their emotions and staying calm lend themselves to further research on the emotional lives of teachers and how they make curriculum and instructional decisions under acute emotional stress. Rather than a terrorist attack on the United States, it is more likely that the source of the stress will come from more ordinary circumstances. Either personal emotions associated with difficulties with the teacher's parents, spouses, children, death or divorce, for example, or reactions to situations within the classroom or school itself. Possible situations are negative pressure from a supervisor, pressure from students' parents or difficulty with a particular student. These pressures

however may result in the same emotions of fear, shock, grief or anger show in this study. How teachers in this study made classroom instructional and curriculum decisions will assist in informing the research on teachers' emotions and their effect on classroom decisions in situations that are not as horrific or on as large a scale as September 11.

As well as in New York City and its suburbs, across the United States teachers struggled with personal emotions as well as the emotions associated with the attack on the nation. On this day, teachers were one of the groups of civil servants who exemplified for others our democratic society. Nel Noddings (1992) speaks of a challenge to care in the teaching profession. Reflecting this challenge, the face of the democratic state that teachers presented was one of caring and calm as they reached out to their students to comfort and explain.

References

- Blacker, David. (10/1/2002). In Memoriam: Understanding Teaching as Public Service. *tcrecord.org*, 11010, 1-11.
- Bowden, Mark. (2003, June 8). Sometimes Heroism Is a Moving Target. *New York Times*, pp1,4.
- Brophy, Jere & VanSledright, Bruce. (1997). *Teaching and Learning History in Elementary Schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Disaster and Trauma. *The Harvard Mental Health Letter*. January, 2002.
- Dolby, Nadine & Burbules, Nicholas C. (8/7/2002). Education and September 11: An Introduction. *tcrecord.org*, 10997, 1-6.
- Eldridge, Richard. (2002). New York City, 9/11. *Independent School*, 61, 12-17.
- Feldman, Sandra. (2001). Survival Lessons. *American Teacher*, 86, 5.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New York: Aldine.
- Good, Thomas L. & Brophy, Jere E. (2000). *Looking in Classrooms*. New York: Longman
- Goodnough, Abby. (2002, May 2). Post-9/11 Pain Found to Linger in Young Minds. *New York Times*, p. 1.
- Huddy, Leonie, Feldman, Stanley, Capelos, Theresa, Provost, Colin. (2002). The Consequences of Terrorism: Disentangling the Effects of Personal and National Threat. *Political Psychology*, 23,485- 509.
- Jackson, Philip. (1968). *Life in Classrooms*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston
- Krey, A.C. (1939). A Curriculum for the Social Studies. James A. Michener (Ed.), *The Future of the Social Studies: Proposals for an Experimental Social-Studies Curriculum*. Cambridge, MA: The National Council for the Social Studies.
- Lehmuller, Pierre & Switzer, Anna. (2002). September 11: An Elementary School at Ground Zero. *Principal*,81,52-54.
- Levstik, Linda S. & Barton, Keith C. (2001). *Doing History: Investigating with Children in Elementary and Middle Schools*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Levstik, Linda S. & Pappas, C. C. (1992). New Directions for Studying Historical Understanding. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 20,369-385.
- Lichtenstein, S., Slovic, P., Fischhoff, B., Layman, M., Combs, B. (1978). Judged Frequency of Lethal Events. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Learning and Memory*, 4, 551-578.
- Lipsky, Michael. (1980). *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

- New York City Board of Education. (2002). Effects of the World Trade Center Attack on NYC Public School Students. New York: New York City Board of Education.
- Noddings, Nel. (1992) *The Challenge to Care in Schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Norris, Fran H., Friedman, Matthew J., Watson, Patricia J. (2002). 60,000 Disaster Victims Speak: Part II. Summary and Implications of the Disaster Mental Health Research. *Psychiatry*, 65, 240-260.
- Norris, Fran H., Friedman, Matthew J., Watson, Patricia J., Byrne, Christopher M., Diaz, Eolia, Kaniasty, Krzysztof. (2002). 60,000 Disaster Victims Speak: Part I. An Empirical Review of the Empirical Literature, 1981-2001. *Psychiatry*, 65, 207- 239.
- Padgett, Deborah K. (2002). Social Work Research on Disasters in the Aftermath of the September 11 Tragedy: Reflections from New York City. *Social Work Research*, 26, 185-192.
- Sutton, Rosemary E. & Wheatley, Karl F. (2003). Teachers' Emotions and Teaching: A Review of the Literature and Directions for Future Research. *Educational Psychology Review*, 15, 327- 358.
- Thaler, R.H. (1983). Illusions and Mirages in Public Policy. *Public Interest*, 73, 60-74.
- White, Hayden. (1980). The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality. *Critical Inquiry*, 7, 5-27.
- White, Morton G. (1965). *Foundations of Historical Knowledge*. New York: Harper & Row.

CHARTS

Chart I: Gender of Teacher Respondents

Gender	Percentage	Number
Female	78%	14
Male	22%	4
Total	100%	18

Chart II: Location of Teacher Respondents

Location	Percentage	Number
Queens	83%	15
Nassau County	17%	3
Total	100%	18

Chart III: Grade Level Taught

Grade Level	Percentage	Number
N - 3	50%	9
4 - 5	28%	5
Higher than 5th	5%	1
No Response	17%	3
Total	100%	18

Chart IV: World Trade Center in Sight

WTC in Sight	Percentage	Number
Yes	33%	6
No	67%	12
Total	100%	18

Chart V: Source of Initial Knowledge of WTC Attacks

Source	Percentage	Number
School Personnel	78%	14
School Phone	0	0
Radio in School	0	0
Television in School	0	0
Other	22%	4
Total	100%	18

Chart VI: Personal Response to Initial Knowledge of WTC Attacks

Response	Percentage	Number
Shock	31%	11
Anger	6%	2
Grief	20%	7
Fear	34%	12
Other	9%	3
Total	100%	35

Chart VII: Instructional Decisions after Knowledge of the WTC Attacks

Decision	Percentage	Number
Principal Explained to the Students	17%	3
Principal told Teachers Not to Mention Attacks to the Students	28%	5
Teacher Explained (No Directions from the Principal)	28%	5
Teacher Did Not Explain (No Directions from the Principal)	22%	4
Other (e.g., Both Principal and Teacher Explained)	5%	1
Total	100%	18

Chart VIII: Correlations between Grade Level Taught and Instructional Decisions

Decision	Grade Level					
	Primary (N-3)		Intermediate (4-5)		Above 5th Grade	
	%	#	%	#	%	#
Principal Explained to the Students	12%	1	22%	2	0	0
Principal told Teachers Not to Mention Attacks to the Students	38%	3	11%	1	100%	1
Teacher Explained (No Directions from the Principal)	12%	1	45%	4	0	0
Teacher Did Not Explain (No Directions from the Principal)	38%	3	11%	1	0	0
Other (e.g., Both Principal and Teacher Explained)	0	0	11%	1	0	0
Total	100%	8	100%	9	100%	1