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# A Narrative Inquiry Exploring the Career Paths of Two Teachers of Developmental Reading in Oregon Community Colleges

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A NARRATIVE INQUIRY EXPLORING THE CAREER PATHS OF TWO TEACHERS OF  
DEVELOPMENTAL READING IN OREGON COMMUNITY COLLEGES

By

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and the School of Education, George Fox University

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to discover the pathways taken by two participants as they became developmental reading instructors in higher education in Oregon. What qualified them as teachers of developmental reading in higher education? A review of the literature resulted in no research journal articles on the topics of training, preparation, or credentialing of developmental reading teachers in higher education. With no published research discovered, narrative inquiry presented an appropriate method to begin to gather and analyze data. Two developmental reading teachers from community colleges in Oregon were selected to record their stories in interviews and to create a written timeline to show the journey of their careers. As their stories were analyzed, four categories emerged: How they started their professional lives; how they discovered developmental reading as a career choice; how they see their positions in the present; and how they envision the future of their careers. Each participant began her professional life outside of developmental reading for college students, and only learned about it as a career option while pursuing something else. They each pursued professional development, one through formal university courses, and one through professional organizations. Both remain committed to teaching developmental reading in community college, and shared ideas regarding the future of the discipline.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am also indebted to the participants who were so generous in sharing their stories, and continuing to refine and correct details. Becoming acquainted with them is a gift I take away from this project. They each represent the best our profession has to offer, and I hope that my esteem for what they have accomplished is clear to the reader.

My family has blessed me with support, beginning with my children, Julie and Kent, whose early challenges with reading and writing sparked my interest and launched me into a field I find endlessly interesting. Between them and my husband, Jeff, I have never lacked in support and encouragement even when a perfect balance between work, school, and family, has just not been possible. My mom, Nancy Sitton, and my sister, Pamela Jackson are also deserving of special thanks. They shared their support in time, travel, and endless conversations.

Finally, I want to express how thankful I am that there was a moment in my own journey, much like that of the participants in this study, that someone presented me with the pleasant discovery that there is a career for those of us who have a passion for teaching developmental reading to adults. Dr. John Plett, of Chemeketa Community College, introduced me to this profession, and the six years spent with the faculty, staff and students at Chemeketa have been the most rewarding teaching experience.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	v
CHAPTER 1 .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	3
Research design .....	3
Research questions .....	4
Key terms .....	5
Limitations and delimitations .....	6
Limitations .....	6
Delimitations .....	6
CHAPTER 2 .....	8
Review of the Literature .....	8
Introduction .....	8
A search for developmental reading programs .....	9
A brief history of reading in higher education .....	10
Developmental education in Oregon colleges .....	13
Source availability .....	14
Becoming a developmental reading teacher .....	14
Summary of the Literature .....	17

CHAPTER 3 .....	19
Methods .....	19
Introduction.....	19
Participants.....	20
Setting .....	21
Research Ethics .....	21
Research Design.....	23
Data Collection .....	24
Analytical Procedures .....	25
Role of the Researcher .....	26
CHAPTER 4 .....	30
Results .....	30
Introduction.....	30
Participants.....	31
Participant #1 - “Sandra” .....	32
Participant #2 – “Karen” .....	39
Analysis.....	44
How they started their professional lives.....	45
How they discovered developmental reading as a career choice.....	46
How they see their positions in the present .....	46
How they envision the future of their careers.....	47
CHAPTER 5 .....	51
Discussion and Conclusions.....	51

Summary .....	51
Discussion .....	51
Integrating my own experience.....	52
What does this study mean to stakeholders?.....	58
Reflection on narrative inquiry method .....	62
Recommendations for further research .....	63
References.....	67
Appendices.....	74
Appendix A – Sample Letter of Consent.....	74
Appendix B – Interview Guide Questions .....	75

**LIST OF FIGURES**

FIGURE 1: Illustration of decision point from Sandra's timeline.....34

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

“I want to teach reading.” This simple statement is the single step that launched my journey. With a clear goal and no doubt that I would find a clear path to becoming a reading teacher, I launched into the pursuit to teach reading to adolescents and adults, and even one day, to help others who shared this passion, to become teachers.

After twelve years of helping students improve their learning and reading skills, one-on-one, in private practice, I was ready to enter the world of public education, and become certified and endorsed to teach reading. My preference was to work with adolescents and adults, which made my goal a little off of the beaten path to begin with, but at the time, I had no idea just how un-beaten the path would be. I learned that in order to become a reading teacher, I would need to first be certified, and as reading is not a recognized content area for initial certification, I would have to begin as a teacher of another subject. Only after becoming certified to teach something else; Spanish, in my case, would I be able to earn an endorsement to become a reading specialist.

Through a rather roundabout journey, I eventually earned a reading endorsement for secondary education, and was hired by a community college to teach developmental reading to students who need to improve their reading abilities in order to do college work. Despite its circuitous nature, I have learned at each step, and intend to continue developing as a professional in this field. From my experience, there appears to be no clearly prescribed path for becoming a reading teacher in higher education. My experience has led me to this topic. What do we know about the preparation of college reading teachers?

In a typical career path, a pre-service teacher earns an undergraduate degree in either education, or a content area, such as math, science, or English, and then applies for a teaching

certificate from the state. In some cases, teachers will have to earn a master's degree in order to be certified. According to our common wisdom, elementary school teachers study general education, and how children learn, and secondary school teachers focus more on the content they are expected to deliver. Moving up, college teachers are expected to have advanced degrees in their content, but not necessarily in educational methods. The higher the level, the higher the degree instructors are expected to have in their content area. In higher education, lower division college courses may be taught by an instructor with a master's level of education, and at higher division courses, we expect instructors to have an earned doctorate. At first, it seems so clear. In order to teach a higher-education course, one must earn an advanced degree in the content that is being taught. Chemistry teachers need graduate degrees in chemistry, history teachers are scholars of history, and so on. But, as I discovered, teaching reading in higher education does not have such a clearly laid-out path.

This question came up when, as a new community college instructor interviewing for an adjunct position, I presumed it was because of my master's degree in psychology, and expected to teach in the social sciences. The administrator conducting the interview explained that what made me stand out in the eyes of the administrator who interviewed me was the Reading Specialist endorsement for secondary education. He explained that he had plenty of instructors with advanced degrees in psychology applying for teaching positions, but to find someone with credentials as a reading instructor at the college entry level was much more of a rare commodity. If we are as rare as this administrator had experienced, this raised many questions: Where were the other reading teachers? And where did they come from? Was their journey a circuitous, round-about way to developmental reading? Were they surprised with the outcome? How are

they prepared? Are there similarities? Is there a pattern in the way we have come to this profession?

### **Statement of the Problem**

Without clear direction on how college reading instructors are prepared, there seemed to be a need to better understand how these teachers prepare and develop. The purpose of this study was to discover the pathways taken by the participants to become developmental reading instructors in higher education. What is their background? What qualifies them as teachers of reading in higher education?

Information on the training, preparation, and credentialing for the teaching of developmental reading in college may prove useful to certain groups who could be considered *stakeholders* in the outcome. Groups for whom this research might prove valuable include those wishing to prepare to be developmental reading teachers, prospective developmental reading teachers, administrators tasked with making personnel decisions, agencies tasked with setting standards, in a somewhat less direct way, the community, and finally, the students in college-level developmental reading courses.

### **Research Design**

This research project proposed to investigate this question by conducting qualitative research in a narrative inquiry study (Clandenin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2013). Narrative inquiry is an appropriate format for research when a problem or issue needs to be explored (Creswell, 2013). With little published information available on the preparation of college reading instructors, this type of a study can provide descriptions and pathways that help further understanding and knowing (Hendry, 2010) and contribute to the pool of published literature on

the topic of the preparation of developmental reading instructors, as well as point to possible future forms of qualitative and quantitative studies on the topic.

The discussion includes the voices of the participants, as well as acknowledgement that the researcher has a background that informs and influences the role of researcher (Striano, 2012), also known as the *reflexivity* of the researcher (Creswell, 2013). The process focused on gathering stories from the participants through multiple means, including interview, field texts, and the creation of a personal historical timeline. The number of participants is small, to allow for in-depth interviewing, data collection, and analysis. For this study three reading instructors from community colleges in Oregon participated in interviews, conversations, and data collection. In the course of interviewing, it was discovered that the first participant interviewed was not considered full-time, so her information was not used in reporting and analyzing, and an additional participant was included.

### **Research Questions**

Clandenin and Connelly (2000) and Creswell (2013) recommend beginning with a central question, designed to guide the participants in telling their stories, and then asking supplemental, open-ended questions that help provide scope and depth. The format is flexible to allow for additional questions as the stories develop.

The central question for this study is, “How did the participants become developmental reading teachers in higher education?” Supplemental questions have been formulated and spelled out in the Methods section, according to Creswell’s (2013) recommendation of only five to seven supplemental questions, designed to support the central question, and allowing for flexibility in formulating additional questions as the study develops. Clandenin and Connelly (2000) note that the nature of narrative inquiry study means that the research questions may need

to be somewhat open to refining and development as the study progresses. Since the nature of the study is to collect and understand the stories of people, it is important to allow those stories to shape the research.

### **Key Terms**

**Annals**--rudimentary shaping and narrating of personal and social histories; lists of dates of memories, events, stories and the like (Clandenin & Connelly, 2000).

**Chronicles**--rudimentary shaping and narrating of personal and social histories; sequences of events in and around a particular topic or narrative thread of interest, for example, *teenage years*, or *traveling years* (Clandenin & Connelly, 2000, p. 112). In this study, the thread of interest is the participants' career path into developmental college reading instruction.

**Developmental Reading**--college courses that are below the entry (100) level are sometimes called "developmental" meaning that students are not quite ready for standard college work. Reading is often offered at a developmental level, and many college reading instructors specialize in developmental reading. This term has recently been found objectionable by some schools, where the preferred term is "transitional" (American Association of Community Colleges, 2000). The term *remedial reading* is also sometimes used to refer to developmental reading, but is considered objectionable as it focuses on students' deficits rather than their developmental placement (Holschuh & Paulson, 2013).

**Interim Texts**--texts situated between field and final, published research texts. Often shared and negotiated with participants (Clandenin & Connelly, 2000).

**Phenomena**--may be used rather than "Research question" Narrative inquiries are composed around a particular wonder or puzzle. The narrative inquiry has a sense of searching,

as in 'to search again.' To continually reformulate the inquiry rather than a sense of defining a problem and seeking a solution (Clandenin & Connelly, 2000).

Reflexivity--when the researcher is positioned in the research, and acknowledges the role in analysis; how the background of the researcher informs interpretations and analysis (Creswell, 2013).

Stakeholders--individuals for whom the results of the study is of particular interest. They have some sort of stake in the outcome, and may find the study of some practical use.

Three-Dimensional Research Space--a way of situating the data in time (past, present and future) as well as position of distance (as an insider or outsider, for example) that helps formulate interpretation (Clandenin & Connelly, 2000).

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

**Limitations.** A limitation was locating participants who met the criteria and were willing to invest in telling their stories. Once contacted, participants were very willing; the difficulty was finding instructors who met the criteria, particularly being a full-time instructor. Community colleges rely on an average of 70% adjunct faculty (American Federation of Teachers AFL-CIO, 2010), making it more difficult to find full-time faculty. The first participant interviewed appeared to meet the criteria, but in the interview it was discovered that she was not considered full-time, even though she was teaching a full credit load in her schedule. Her interview proved helpful as a practice run in data collection, but her information was not used in the reporting and analyzing of the results. An additional participant was sought and included in the study to meet the goal of having two participants.

**Delimitations.** The main delimitation of this study is its small sample size. With only two participants, the focus was on collecting enough information to create a rich and detailed

understanding of the career pathway of each participant. The small sample size does not allow for generalizing the results. This study utilizes a narrative inquiry approach to tell the stories of two individuals and how they came to be developmental reading instructors in higher education. To this end, I have chosen to interview two individuals who are currently employed full-time in the community college system as developmental reading instructors. Because of the possibility of differences with developmental reading programs and instructors in other states, both participants are employed in Oregon schools. Campus directories were consulted, and individuals contacted based on the directory information. On return contact, each individual was screened to insure that the study qualifications were met.

The first participant was not technically a full-time instructor, so her interview was not used. In addition, it was not part of the original proposal to seek out participants with ten or more years of experience, but after selection, it was discovered that both participants had ten or more years of experience, which, added much depth to the project.

The focus of this study was to analyze in in-depth fashion, these two stories. It will not be possible to generalize findings from this study, given the small number of participants.

## Chapter Two

### Review of the Literature

#### Introduction

The foundation of narrative inquiry research is the story. The purpose is to capture the stories of participants and engage in complex and deep analysis (Clandenin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2013). In the spirit of the nature of narrative inquiry, this review of the literature tells the story of the search for information on which to base this inquiry.

The central question guiding this project was, “How did the participants become developmental reading teachers in higher education?” To answer this question, I searched academic databases for information on the preparation of developmental reading teachers in higher education.

Searching the academic databases did not reveal a single journal article that discussed the preparation, recruiting, or credentialing of developmental reading teachers in adult education. Lacking journal articles, the search turned to organization newsletters, accreditation requirements, and recruitment postings for jobs in developmental reading in higher education. The following shows the steps taken, then, suggest a plan for additional research. In a narrative inquiry project, it is not uncommon to start with a more limited list of resources, with additional resources developed in the course of the study, particularly during the analysis stage (Clandenin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2013).

The online employment database, *HigherEdJobs.com*, announces open positions in higher education, along with requirements and job descriptions for each position. An inquiry of the database, using the term *developmental reading* returned 82 positions across the United States. Looking deeper into some of these announcements, the minimum qualifications list, “A Master’s

degree in the teaching field, or a Master's in any teaching field (HigherEdJobs: Maricopa Community Colleges, 2012), "Master's degree with a major in secondary or adult reading, (HigherEdJobs: Rochester Community and Technical College, 2012), "Earned doctorate in reading/language arts, linguistics, or related field" (HigherEdJobs: New Jersey City University, 2012), "Master's degree in Education, English, Composition, Developmental Education, Reading, Adult Education or closely related field," (Tacoma Community College, 2012). Each also announced the requirement of experience teaching developmental reading in a college.

The pathway to a position in developmental reading is not straightforward, as this small sample demonstrates. Typically, to teach in a subject area in higher education, one earns a graduate degree in the content area, such as mathematics, science, or literature, and then teaches in that, or a related field. In developmental reading for adults, the pathway is not so easily discovered. What was missing in the above cited position announcements is the common thread that one would expect; the "master's degree or earned doctorate in adult developmental reading" is not present. This thought lead to the next line of inquiry: "Where does one study adult developmental reading?"

### **A Search for Developmental Reading Programs**

Searches in the academic databases available through the George Fox University Library returned no information in journal articles about where teachers had studied, or where programs were available, so I turned to the much less academic source of Google. A search for "Where to study adult developmental reading" (Google, 2013) indicated about 20 million references, but a search through the first three pages of results led to articles about developmental reading without indicating programs for study, except for two entries. Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington and Sam Houston State University in Texas each offer a certificate in

adult reading. The Online Certificate for developmental reading program announcement from Sam Houston State University College of Education lists its rationale for creating an online certificate program for developmental reading the “scarcity of qualified applicants,” which forces developmental education departments to “hire under-qualified instructors”(Sam Houston State University, 2013). The Western Washington University/Woodring College of Education announcement is for a program in “continuing and college education,” with no particular reference to reading (2013). The rest of the three pages of entries generated by the search engine were centered on courses where one could enroll as a student in a community college, in a developmental reading program or for developmental reading in pre K – 12 settings (Google, 2013).

Additional search combinations were tried. The key words “teaching adults to read,” resulted in a list of eighteen “popular” schools where one could become qualified to “teach adults to read” (Teaching adults to read, 2012). This list of online programs included institutions such as Kaplan University, University of Phoenix, Capella University, Grand Canyon University, and others. While many of the schools listed Masters’ and Ph.D./Ed.D. degrees in higher education and adult education, there was not a single specific reading program.

While far from scientific, this initial search process demonstrated a gap in the research as to how one becomes a developmental reading teacher for college students, and a need to look deeper into this area of specialization. It made the question, “How does one become a developmental reading teacher for college students?” somewhat more difficult to answer through extant research.

### **A Brief History of Reading in Higher Education**

Developmental programs in college are those designed to help students who are underprepared gain the skills necessary to succeed in college (Stahl & Boylan, 2003). Boylan

(2003) discusses the “myth” of the prepared college student, noting that the first students that attended Harvard in 1636 had to be tutored in Greek and Latin as they were not prepared enough to begin their studies without additional help. In the colonial period, a college or university education was limited to ‘gentlemen’ who were expected to take their place as leaders in society, and whether or not they had adequate reading and writing skills was not the first priority (Stahl & Boylan, 2003; Tai & Rochford, 2007; Thelin, 2011). The need for preparatory assistance for students is nothing new. Wyatt (1992) outlines a history of extra help to be prepared for college studies going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when secondary schools were not prevalent, and to prepare for college, students were expected to find tutors to help them acquire the basic skills in geography, arithmetic, reading, and spelling. According to Wyatt (1992), in 1879, half of Harvard’s students failed the entrance exam and were admitted “on condition.”

Moving closer to the present, the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, more popularly known as the GI Bill of Rights provided a catalyst to make higher education accessible to more than just the young male elite. Provisions were made for help paying for tuition, a living allowance, and income while unemployed, among other benefits (United States Department of Veteran’s Affairs, 2013). Colleges had to adjust to non-traditional students, who would previously had either not been admitted in the first place, or expelled if it were discovered that they were married, for example. The expectation was that very few veterans would actually claim the right to attend college (Wyatt, 1992). By 1946, more than one million veterans had enrolled in college, challenging the traditional image of a college student, as these new students were often married, had children, and were not prepared in the same way as traditional students had been prepared in the past (Thelin, 2011). In 1948, Gray called for college reading to be taught to all college students, specifically with attention to providing training for remedial and

disabled readers (Wyatt, 1992). By 1956, the Eisenhower administration saw no need for continuing to extend assistance for reading and colleges were reverting to the previous standards of admissions, resulting in more homogeneous college populations of more traditional students. But, when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in 1957, the tide turned yet again, and the National Defense Education act of 1958 released money for loans, fellowships and other ways for non-traditional students in science and math to earn a college education (Wyatt, 1992).

In 1960, the Kennedy administration began to provide direct federal help to colleges, and in 1965, the Higher Education Act provided direct assistance to undergraduate students, leading to many institutions broadening their admission policies, which required accompanying assistance for students who needed academic support (Thelin, 2011; Wyatt, 1992). Even in the nation's most selective universities, 21% of the entering freshman class needed remedial reading (Wyatt, 1992).

Between 1960 and the present, the demographics of college students has continued to change, and currently, colleges are faced, yet again, with redefining the profile of the student body. In the 1960s and 1970s a college education became the means to a better life, and with a democratization of admissions policies, it became more important than ever before to supplement students with academic skills (Thelin, 2011; Wyatt, 1992). The 1980s and 1990s continued to challenge the notion of a "traditional" student by including more minority students, including those who were learning English as a second language in addition to other academic needs (Wyatt, 1992).

This brief recap of historical trends shows that there is a long-standing need for developmental reading instruction in American colleges, going back to Harvard in the 1600s. In this search, however, no research was found on how those developmental reading teachers were

prepared. Where would one go to study to become a developmental reading teacher? The need for developmental reading seems to be well-established, but the avenue to preparing as a teacher to meet this need is less well-articulated.

### **Developmental Education in Oregon Colleges**

In the state of Oregon, developmental education is assigned to the community college system and regulated by the Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development. Under Division 7: Programs (Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development, 2013a), the regulations for enrollment, course development, tuition, records, and accreditation are outlined for vocational and General Equivalency Diploma (GED) programs. No particular mention is made for reading, but in describing the qualification of instructors, a Master's degree is listed as a requirement for instructors in academic programs. The Division 8: Community College Personnel Policies (Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development, 2013b) sets out policies related to hiring, evaluating, and retaining instructors. The policy (589-008-0100, #1b) states that:

...standards for teachers of lower division collegiate courses must include a masters (sic) degree in a subject area closely related to that in which the instructor will be teaching; however in subject areas in which individuals have demonstrated their competencies and served in professional fields and in cases in which documentation to support the individual's proficiency and high level of competency can be assembled, the master's degree requirement may be waived at the discretion of the college president.

Perhaps this flexibility explains some of the language found earlier in the job search database (HigherEdJobs.com, 2012), where recruiters ask for “closely related” degrees, lacking the ability to be prepared in a graduate degree in developmental reading.

### **Source Availability**

Rather than finding information on how to become a developmental reading instructor in higher education, the available research reported on other issues facing developmental education. These articles focused on topics such as the need to continue to develop and improve current programs (Adelman, 1996; Bragg, 2001; Burley, 2007; Higbee, Arendale & Lundell, 2005; Kirsch, Braun, Yamamoto & Sum, 2008; Kozeracki, 2002; Kozeraki & Brooks, 2008; McMillan, Parks & Lanning, 1997; Mills, 2010; Roueche & Roueche, 1993b; Roueche & Roueche, 1999; Roueche, Richardson, Neal, & Roueche, 2008; Roueche & Waiwaiole, 2009), descriptions of programs (Bahe, 1970; Curtis & Kruidenier, 2005; Levin & Calcagno, 2008; Quirk, 2005), and studies focused on characteristics and needs of students (Bettinger & Long, 2005a; Bettinger & Long, 2005b; DiMaria, 2006; Ilich, Hagan & McCallister, 2004; Pinkerton, 2010; Roueche & Roueche, 1993a; Roueche & Roueche, 1994).

### **Becoming a Developmental Reading Teacher**

For the purposes of this project, a search for articles that described developmental reading teachers was paramount. Who are they? How do they prepare? How are credentials assigned? How does one go about professional development? As the search resulted in no research studies, the scope was widened to include non-scientific literature, and the parameters expanded a bit to include terms that would provide helpful information from tangential sources.

To begin with, R.D. Robinson (2006), Professor of Literacy Education at the University of Missouri, writes about teaching reading in high school. His reflection is brief, and gathered

into five-year increments over a 25-year career, in which he chronicles the way one's attitude and behavior changes over the years. His narrative traces the arc from an eager first-year teacher, through those first years of constant preparation sprinkled with idealism, through the waves of the latest preference of phonics or whole language methods, and ultimately becoming confident as a teacher, learning what works, keeping credentials up, and ultimately being satisfied with the rewards of helping students learn to read. There is no mention of the degree he holds, other than keeping a teaching certificate current, and it is not about college instruction, but it is cited because it serves as an example of what typically comes up in searches for information on reading teachers in college. Typically, there will be several available, but the focus is usually on training teachers to teach reading, most commonly in the early elementary grades. This, at least, was a secondary school application, which is tangential to the search.

Next, from the International Reading Association (IRA), the results of a three-year IRA-commissioned study on the quality of teacher preparation titled, *Prepared to Make a Difference: An executive summary of the National Commission on Excellence in elementary teacher preparation* (International Reading Association, 2003). This study examines the preparation of reading teachers for elementary grades, and compares their results in the classroom and the quality of their preparation. The results indicated that teachers who were educated in quality reaching programs were more effective in the classroom, and key features of a quality training program were identified (content, apprenticeship, vision, resources and mission, personalized teaching, autonomy, community and assessment). This article applies to the project in that it discusses the preparation of reading teachers for K-12, but it also illustrates a difficulty in the search for resources, and that is the lack of information available regarding teaching reading to

adults. Information on teaching early elementary readers and teaching individuals to teach reading K-12 is much more readily available.

Closer to the target of this study, a Career and Technical Education (CTE) instructor spoke to a group in 2007 about his decision to integrate literacy into his CTE instruction. In the 1970s, Gagnon (Ziemba & Gagnon, 2009) was a high school English teacher, but he had not been prepared to teach secondary students how to read. He started out as an automotive instructor, believing that his responsibility was the technical content, but as he worked with students, he realized the importance of literacy skills as he experienced frustration with how unprepared his students were to manage being employed in a competitive workplace. This two-page spread introduces Gagnon, and how he has come around to believing that helping adult students be better at literacy skills is important in vocational education. It is a little closer to learning something about teaching reading to adults in developmental reading courses at a community college, as it introduces a CTE instructor, but it is a very brief introduction and it is not a research study (Ziemba & Gagnon, 2009).

In 2006, Stahl published an interview with two developmental reading and learning instructors in *The Journal of Developmental Education*. Their careers began in the 1970's as secondary reading instructors and in the early 1980's they transitioned into teaching developmental reading to college students. The article discusses the importance of ongoing professional development, the need to focus on theory and understand the importance of interactive and strategic learning at a foundational level, understanding the underlying process of how students learn rather than focusing on methods. This article describes the interviewees, and their preparation, but mostly discusses how to select strategies that work for students as readers.

Finally, and most directly related to this study, is an interview with Dr. Charles Perfetti (Shaughnessy, 2009). Dr. Perfetti (as cited in Shaughnessy, 2009) is a university professor of psychology and since September 2008, has been the director of the Learning Research and Development Center of the University of Pittsburgh. Perfetti began his studies at the University of Illinois when he thought he would become a math teacher. However, after his first, and only, undergraduate education course, he chose his major from the non-education courses he was taking at the time, economics and psychology, as it seemed that the education courses lacked serious intellectual content. He went on to earn a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Michigan in 1967. Over the years, his interests focused on psycholinguistic questions, which led to comprehension, and eventually to reading. He points out that his interest is not so much in reading education as it is in reading science. His main agenda is to explore questions about phonology, comprehension, and other areas that relate to reading. His story demonstrates the arc of someone who has gone on to study developmental reading in higher education, although he is not a reading teacher.

### **Summary of the Literature**

There are studies, interviews, and stories that address aspects of the research question, but I was unable to find even one study that discusses in any depth the career path of developmental reading teachers in a college setting. This information would be useful to pre-service teachers who wish to teach reading at the college level, teachers looking into professional development and college and community college administrators who have to make hiring and program decisions. As a narrative inquiry study, it is well-suited to a topic where there is such a lack of research studies. The intention is to fill this gap, in a small way, with an in-depth analysis of two

developmental reading teachers in Oregon community colleges; to capture their stories and their reflections on their careers, and see what we might be able to learn from their experience.

## Chapter Three

### Methods

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to discover how the participants came to the career of teaching developmental reading to adults in higher education. As the literature review resulted in little information on this topic, it seems that research addressing this question might be helpful to the teachers, prospective teachers, administrators tasked with hiring and accreditation, and finally, students. A narrative approach will be utilized, guided by the *Narrative Inquiry* model (Clandenin & Connelly, 2000) and the work of Creswell (2013) to collect and analyze the stories of college reading teachers; to document the background, career experiences, and major influences that led them to their current positions as developmental reading teachers in higher education.

Narrative inquiry is particularly useful when an issue needs to be explored (Creswell, 2013), and as the literature review returned little or no research on the career path of teachers of developmental reading in higher education, a narrative inquiry approach would be well-suited to beginning to understand the central question of this study, “How did the participants become developmental reading teachers in higher education?” Because it seems that there is no direct path that qualifies higher education reading teachers, no specific educational or credentialing framework in place for individuals to look to for guidance, a study of how the participants arrived in their positions may prove helpful to those who wish to become developmental reading teachers in college, administrators who need to hire developmental reading teachers, those who need to make program decisions for students and potential teachers, those who might desire to train and prepare developmental reading teachers.

## Participants

Employing a narrative inquiry demands in-depth research into each participant, giving each a chance to truly tell and explore his or her own story. To allow for rich storytelling, two participants were selected. To remain consistent with the research model, I selected two full-time instructors who teach developmental reading in higher education. In the state of Oregon, developmental reading education occurs in the community college system, so for this study the participants were selected from developmental reading instructors in the community college system.

The selection process began with a search of community college websites. It was not difficult to find developmental reading instructors, but the added criterion of being a full-time faculty member narrowed the field quite a bit, as about 70% of community instructors are adjunct (American Federation of Teachers AFL-CIO, 2010). To ensure openness and avoid any awkwardness that might result from involving a colleague, participants from outside of my own workplace was preferred.

My first participant was an adjunct instructor at two community colleges, and in the year prior to this project, one of the colleges hired her, and she was able to leave the second college. My understanding is that she took a full-time position, but in our initial meeting, I learned that she was still part-time, so we went ahead and recorded the interview, but it was not used in this analysis. Although disappointing, the experience did serve as a very helpful in providing a practice run with the data collection process.

The two participants that were selected in this purposeful sample were discovered through professional network connections. I searched for instructors that were previously unknown to me, but with the limited pool size, a small compromise was made. I had never met

“Sandra”, the first participant, until this project. “Karen” and I had met before in professional meetings, but we never worked together, or been employed at the same workplace. Each has been at their position, at least full time, for at least ten years. Although length in the position was not an initial criterion for selection, having at least ten years in the position did provide additional depth as they were able to share from substantial experience. Their extensive backgrounds provided the opportunity for rich, multi-layered stories and analysis. Each participant is identified by a pseudonym, and care has been taken in the discussion of where each participant teaches to protect their privacy, and not disclose their specific work location.

### **Setting**

Deciding where to conduct the interviews and follow up contact was based mainly on the question of how comfortable the participants would be in sharing their stories. The practice participant interview took place in a family-style restaurant in the off-hours between lunch and dinner. We had plenty of time, about ninety minutes, and the conversation was relaxed and easy. The rumble of conversation around us provided white noise that allowed us to focus on what we were saying, without worry of being overheard. It did make transcription a little more difficult, but the digital recorder had a function that allowed screening of background noise, so it was not a difficult challenge. With this practice experience, I offered public, but somewhat quiet, places to each of the other two participants. One chose to meet in the food court on campus, moving to the privacy of her office, and the other chose to meet in a local coffee shop.

Follow up contacts were made through email, texts, phone calls and video-conferencing.

### **Research Ethics**

The design and implementation of this study followed procedures identified by the George Fox University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants were contacted only after

receiving approval from the IRB for the process for this study, including the informed consent letter (Appendix A). All materials collected for this project have remained in my possession throughout the course of the study, in a locked file cabinet, accessible only to me. Three years following the completion of this project, I will destroy all materials, including the letters of consent, digital recordings, and any other material that may identify participants. In doing so, I will have followed all conventional legal, moral, and ethical safeguards required for scholarly research and established by the George Fox University Review Board.

Initial contact with each participant was made through an introductory email. In the following email conversation, a digital copy of the informed consent letter was sent, along with a brief description of the study, and the list of guide questions (Appendix B). The letters were collected at the appointments. Participants were encouraged to be open and honest, but that they were in no way obligated to share information that made them uncomfortable.

In order to ensure the anonymity and the confidentiality of all participants, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. To randomize the assignment of pseudonyms, a list of popular baby names from 50 years ago was consulted (Baby Center, 2013). The top ten names were written out on sheets of paper, and two were drawn. The names, “Karen” and “Sandra” were chosen.

As an additional means of protecting their identity, the community college where each participant teaches, and specific details about their journey that could reveal their identity specifically identified. This commitment to anonymity made it impossible to reproduce their personal timelines as part of this project, as their timelines were filled with personal identifying data that would make them easily recognized.

## Research Design

Narrative inquiry is built around the stories of the participants. Hendry (2010) points out that narrative research is the oldest form of inquiry, as the oral storytelling tradition of early human history sought to understand and explain the world and that from the beginning, at the heart of research, is the asking of questions. A central research question guides the inquiry, but the stories of the participants shape the direction and the analysis of the question under examination. Questions are open-ended, evolving and non-directional and will tend to lead to additional questions that emerge as a result of the research (Clandenin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) recommends creating one central question to guide the research, with five to seven supporting questions that help develop the central question.

For this study the central question was: “How did the participants become developmental reading teachers in higher education?” Creswell (2013) recommends that a small number, between five and seven, supplemental questions designed to help provide scope and depth to the inquiry are sufficient. The main consideration is that the participant is telling his/her story, and questions that arise as a result of the interaction are accepted, and the nature of the interview is adaptable to the participant’s story. With this in mind, the supplemental questions to support the central question were:

1. What, in your personal life, led you to a career in teaching reading?
2. Would you please detail the professional path that led you to this position?
3. Looking at critical moments when you needed to make a career decision, how did you make those choices?
4. What outside influences shaped your decisions? Perhaps things such as the economy, job opportunities, location, family life, etc., but if you think of anything else, I would welcome any insight and comment.
5. What do you ‘do’ as a reading teacher that’s in your job description?
6. What do you ‘do’ as a reading teacher that is not in your official job description?
7. What is it like for you in your position?
  - a. What rewards keep you there?
  - b. What do you find difficult or discouraging?

These questions guided in framing the participant interviews, but within the structure of narrative inquiry, additional questions emerged as the teachers told their stories and the narratives were analyzed. An additional question arose after some analysis, of whether they had a role model or mentor to help them along the way. Neither participant discussed this directly, so the participants were contacted to discuss whether or not someone had served as a role model or mentor for them as they made career choices.

### **Data Collection**

Once the two participants were identified and contacted, appointments for personal interviews were made. Each participant agreed to an initial interview of 90 minutes with additional interviews to follow, as needed, with an expectation at the outset for at least one additional interview for any clarification and additional questions that were developed through the analysis process. Each initial interview did, indeed, last about 90 minutes, and was recorded on a digital voice recorder.

At the beginning of each interview, the participant was furnished with a 14 x 17 inch sheet of paper and a collection of markers, pens and pencils, in order to construct a timeline, and a list of the guide questions. Each participant was given the option of reading over the questions and addressing the topics, or having me read the questions, one by one, for them to answer. They both chose to read the list of questions for themselves, and talk through the answers, conversationally. As the interviewer, I mainly listened, to avoid interruption of the flow of their own stories as little as possible. Toward the end of each interview, we went over the list of the questions together to make sure nothing was left out. Each interview was ended with the participant being invited to add anything that hadn't been specifically addressed.

While each participant answered the questions and told stories, each one also worked on creating a written timeline. One used a variety of markers and created a color-coded system, specifying personal and professional pathways with different colors. The other participant preferred to be very simple, opting to use only black ink.

After each interview, I made notes about the place, additional questions, and other observations. After all of the interviews were recorded, I transcribed each one, and emailed a digital copy to each of the participants for their input, to make any corrections or additions. During the analysis phase, additional questions arose, particularly the question of whether or not each participant had been mentored or had a role model or someone they looked to for guidance in their career choices. Additional contact was made through text, email, phone and video conferencing.

### **Analytical Procedures**

For analysis of the data, Clendenin and Connelly's (2000) model was selected, mainly because of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, where the stories are looked at in a forward and backward way, as well as zooming in and then out again to analyze elements of the story, and then step back to see the larger picture. Given that the nature of this inquiry is to examine individual journeys to becoming developmental reading instructors, this metaphor provides a model well-suited to parse the data.

The Clendenin and Connelly (2000) model of narrative inquiry consists of three major parts: Collecting information, organizing the information, and writing the final dissertation text. There is some fluidity between each of these stages that may seem a bit uneasy at times as the researcher may need to continue to ask and dig into the information, rewriting and searching for themes. Organizing the information is done in the writing and rewriting of the stories, putting

them into chronological order, and making note of themes, important events, and the impact of the experience on the individual. As the texts are examined and rewritten, themes become clear as the final research text is completed. Striano (2012) emphasizes the importance of the process, in addition to the product and cautions that, in the pursuit of results, the process not be overlooked or circumvented.

### **Role of the Researcher**

This research was conducted as a requirement toward completion of the Doctor of Education degree through George Fox University. Attention to all proper ethical procedures and appropriate analysis from the data collected were my responsibility. Additionally, as a college developmental reading teacher, I was conducting research among my professional peers.

The role of the researcher in a narrative inquiry is not completely objective or neutral. The researcher, by design, enters the process in a particular participating role. The researcher selects a topic, questions, methods, analysis, and reporting. Clandenin and Connelly (2000) point out the tension that comes between retelling a life story and reliving a life story, and how, as researchers we are engaged in living and telling these stories, of ourselves, and our participants. The participants are invited to comment on the process and participate in shaping the questions and the research becomes an experience for them as well. Researchers in this framework are expected to convey their background and how it informs their interpretation of the information in the study. Awareness of how one is placed in the study as a narrative inquiry researcher is called *reflexivity* (Creswell, 2013) and it is imperative in the data collection and analysis phase to be aware of the bond that is created between participants and researcher. Striano (2012) emphasizes the role of the narrative inquiry researcher as one who makes meaning of his/her own experience and must acknowledge the “self” in the organizing structure.

As a researcher, it was important to be aware of my own story, and pay attention to how my own history may have created areas of resonance, where I may have thought I understood or had a preconceived idea of what the participant was expressing. Ever mindful of this dynamic, I worked to let the stories of each participant speak for themselves, and ask rather than fill in, when there was an event or other phenomenon to analyze.

This study grew out of my own experience. I wanted to become a reading teacher in the state of Oregon. I was surprised to learn that to become a reading teacher, one must first become certified to teach in some other content area, and then add a reading endorsement, as an added specialty endorsement (Teacher Standard and Practices Commission, 2013). So, to become a reading teacher, I earned an initial teaching certificate in secondary Spanish in 2008, and then went on to earn a reading endorsement for secondary education in 2009. Just as I was finishing up the initial teaching certificate, I learned about teaching positions at a nearby community college, and applied for an adjunct, position, expecting to be considered for a position teaching psychology, as I already held a Master of Science degree in educational and developmental psychology. During the interview, the administrator told me that my most marketable skill for him was my background in helping students with learning disabilities, and my training as a reading specialist. In his experience, psychology instructors were plentiful, but finding someone with experience and qualifications to teach reading to adults was a much rarer commodity. I was hired as an adjunct, and spent the next six years teaching sections of developmental reading, study skills, and only the occasional psychology course.

Since my own experience as a community college student in the 1980s, I have wanted to teach at the community college level. The opportunity to teach, whatever the content area, represented achievement of a life goal for me, but to have it in the area of reading blended two

strands of my life's work so far. Had I known how to direct my path toward this position, I would have done so years ago, but because it took me somewhat by surprise, I wonder how others in this position found their way here. Was there a direct path that I somehow missed? Was there a way I could have pursued earlier, if I had only known more, or looked harder? Was there some kind of knowledge I didn't have because my family was not familiar with college education? My father, one of the most intelligent people I know, never finished college. He was drafted shortly after high school, and after finishing his military service, went into law enforcement, where he was able to retire after a very satisfying career. My mother went to community college right out of high school, but then married young, and only finished her bachelor's degree and became a teacher at the same time I was finishing high school. Looking back, I see how their lack of familiarity with the system limited the way we looked at higher education, so I wondered if, perhaps, our limited view caused me to miss some clue to finding the path to developmental reading. I also wondered if, perhaps, having two children with reading disabilities only caused me to have a passion for reading later in life. Perhaps I would not have been interested, even if the opportunity had presented itself, earlier.

Thankful for my position, and wanting to continue to develop as a professional, I decided to pursue a doctorate in education, using the unassigned credits I had accumulated while earning a reading endorsement as a starting base. Since I was continuing, rather than starting a new program, I had not thought about the question of where to study. The next step was simply there, so I took it. It was not until looking for jobs in developmental reading, when I wondered what were the desired qualifications, that I began to wonder if there was a specific course of study or preparation.

All of these questions made me wonder how my colleagues in developmental reading arrived at their position. Was it as much of a surprise to them as it was to me? Had they started out with the goal and pursued it? Did they know early on that they wanted to teach reading to adults? Did personal or family events cause them to develop a passion, or make certain crucial decisions that determined their path?

As the researcher on this project, it is clear that my own path has given me a passion and curiosity for this topic, and it has led me to my own story. As a researcher, though, it was my goal to listen and report the stories from the point of view of their own tellers, being aware of when my story may have clouded or inhibited my own interpretation. It was imperative to remember to ask questions, and allow the answers to stand on their own, in their original voice, realizing that throughout the process, the narrator (or researcher) is affected by the story (Schaafsma & Finz, 2011) and must be aware of the invisible influences that shape the process and outcome (Brock, 2011).

## Chapter Four

### Results

#### Introduction

This study investigated, through narrative inquiry, the career paths of two developmental reading instructors teaching at community colleges in Oregon. The goal was to provide answers to the question, “How did the participants become developmental reading teachers in higher education?”

A review of available literature yielded no journal articles on the preparation, recruiting or credentialing of developmental reading instructors in adult education. Some aspects of developmental reading in a college or university have received scholarly attention, such as the history of developmental programs, continued need, and questions of methodology in reaching students, but nothing addressed the question of how to become a developmental reading instructor. Once this gap in the literature became evident, this study was designed as an inquiry into the career paths of developmental reading instructors, and how they came to their current positions. A narrative approach was selected in order to gather information through storytelling, and give shape to the telling (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011) for an issue that needs to be explored (Creswell, 2013).

This study attempts to address this gap in research by taking the stories of two developmental reading instructors in higher education, and looking for the threads and themes that emerge in the telling and analysis of their stories. In the reading and retelling of each story, similarities emerged, helping to establish themes for comparing and understanding each journey.

## **Participants**

To select qualified participants, I began by looking at websites for community colleges, and searching the faculty for developmental reading instructors. While it was easy to find developmental reading teachers, whether or not they were adjunct or full-time was not as apparent, so further searching was needed. Given that approximately seventy percent of community college instructors are adjunct (American Federation of Teachers AFL-CIO, 2010); the search became even more difficult. In fact, the first participant that was interviewed turned out to not be a full time instructor. She had left an adjunct position for a larger responsibility at another campus, but even so, her position remained adjunct, so her interview was used for practice, and to refine the process for the participants included in this study.

Through professional networks, I was able to contact two instructors who fit the study criteria of being a full-time developmental reading instructor at an Oregon community college. With each participant, we met for an initial 90-minute interview, and then followed up with email, telephone conversations, and video networking. Our face-to-face interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. After each interview, I recorded my thoughts and observations about the interview, and included them with the transcription of the interviews. After I transcribed each interview, it was sent as an email attachment to each participant for her corrections, clarifications, and additions. Once all of the transcription and notes were gathered from the first round of interviews, I read over the content, additional questions were developed, and a second round of interviews was conducted with each participant via email, phone, and online video conversations. Since these follow up interviews were brief and focused narrowly on a particular question, I used notes and email to document the conversations.

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym, selected randomly from a list of the top ten baby girl names from 1963 (Baby Center, 2013). The first participant is called “Sandra” and the second, “Karen.” This system of selection was chosen to ensure that there would be no researcher bias, or inadvertent revealing of identities.

### **Participant #1 – “Sandra”**

“Sandra” and I met at a coffee shop in the town where she teaches developmental reading at a branch campus of an Oregon community college. I arrived about ten minutes ahead of the scheduled time, hoping to find a quiet place where we could visit with enough quiet to be able to enter into storytelling without feeling inhibited or interrupted by the atmosphere. My eyes scanned the shop, as I wondered if I had arrived first. Sandra was sitting at a counter near the entrance, having arrived just a moment or two earlier. We ordered something to drink, and found some stuffed chairs in a far corner, where, after a brief introductory exchange, were able to get started. We went over the informed consent letter, and the guide questions.

The main purpose of the interview was for Sandra to tell her story, with special attention to the decision points that led her to become a developmental reading teacher, and the guide questions were designed simply to provide a format for storytelling. When offered the choice between a question and answer format, or to just tell her story, using the questions as a guide, Sandra chose to talk through the questions in a narrative format and I would listen, record, and then check for any missed questions before finishing up. As she thought through her past, and was thinking over where to start, I provided her a large sheet of white paper, and a selection of pens, pencils, and markers, to create a timeline of her experience while we spoke. She chose to use only black ink in creating her timeline, beginning in the top left corner, and working her way across the page in a straight line.

“Alright, I guess I’ll start. I’ll start way back.” Sandra began her story with her graduation from a small, private college in Oregon, in the mid-1970s with a bachelor’s degree in Spanish. She chose her major out of a love for language, but without a clear sense of career direction. Growing up in southern California, every Spanish teacher with whom she was acquainted was a native speaker, so she did not expect to become a Spanish teacher. So, wondering what she would do with her language skill and a bachelor’s degree, she began taking civil service exams to seek out jobs for which she was qualified. In short order, she became an auditor for the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) in California. She describes training for the IRS where she was joined by a friend with a degree in rhetoric from UC Berkley and coworkers with degrees in geography and Russian:

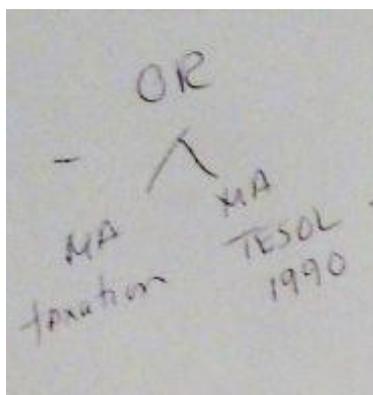
It was sort of the retraining program for people with liberal arts degrees. My best friend had a degree in rhetoric from UC Berkley, and my boss had a degree in geography, and somebody else working there had a degree in Russian, and I was there and I hated it, and eventually got a part-time job teaching English. I wanted to teach Spanish in a private school, and they said, “no,” because I wasn’t a native speaker. They said, “You can teach English to foreign businesspeople,” so I began to do that and I liked it. I realized that I really didn’t know what I was doing.

She recalls hating the work as an auditor, but needing the steady income, she began to look for work part time as a Spanish teacher. She was not able to find a position teaching Spanish, but she was offered the opportunity to teach some English classes to foreign businesspeople, which she found she liked, but didn’t feel she knew what she was doing. Eventually, Sandra transitioned to preparing taxes on her own, and continued teaching English

part time in California until the mid-1980s, when certain circumstances caused her to consider her career options, and evaluate her future direction.

Sandra considered a move from California back to Oregon. She mentioned that about that time she was dealing with the decision of where to live because of a marriage and divorce. At about the time she moved to Oregon, the rules for tax preparation were also undergoing some major changes, and in order to continue working in that area, she would have needed to go through recertification and training. She considered earning a master's degree in taxation. Given the sizable commitment to a career she did not really like, she also considered a master's degree in teaching English. At this moment in our interview, Sandra turned her attention to the timeline, on which she had noted her graduation from college, and her work with the IRS. The next item she illustrated as a decision point, showing the choice between going forward with a master's degree in either taxation or teaching English as a second language. This was clearly a pivotal moment in deciding the path for the rest of her life. She gave it considerable attention at the time, and continues to look back at it as a defining moment in her professional life.

FIGURE 1: Illustration of decision point from Sandra's timeline.



Sandra chose to move to Oregon, and decided between the secure financial future of a career in taxation, or the work she enjoyed more, as a teacher, which, according to those around her, was only part time work and that she would never survive. The choice, for her was about the quality of her life. “Everyone told me it was only part time work. You’ll never survive. But I thought I couldn’t survive this one (taxation) physically.” So, she went to work on earning a master’s degree at another small university in Oregon. She finished her degree in about 1990, and continued at her university as a teacher in their English language institute. She began teaching English to foreign students as a graduate student in a year-to-year full-time employee arrangement. Although she carried a full-time schedule, her contract was only renewed annually, and there was no security from year to year. She continued for ten years in this arrangement, until the university started to change their employment policies, and the stability of her position was gone.

She moved to Washington State where she worked for both a university and a community college, balancing two part-time positions. Both institutions assigned her heavy teaching schedules of English as a Second Language (ESL) students, and the community college added a new teaching assignment. She was asked to teach developmental writing. This was her first time teaching American students, which she found much easier than teaching to non-native speakers. It was more about organization, and learning to communicate specifically in their writing, rather than learning the basics of language. She was only in Washington for one year, and during that time did not teach reading. Her year in Washington motivated Sandra to look for more steady work, and because of a connection in Oregon, she heard of a full-time position at the community college where she currently teaches.

An acquaintance told Sandra about a full-time position in Oregon that included teaching ESL, developmental reading and writing, and GED courses. She had experience in ESL and developmental writing, but not developmental reading or teaching for GED. She was hired. The previous director of developmental education had just quit and there was little assistance. Sandra stepped into the position of Director with about a week to prepare for the classes she had been assigned:

...When I started, when I walked in, the previous director of developmental education had just quit. The person I was replacing was already gone, and I said, “What am I supposed to teach?” because I knew it was supposed to be ESL, developmental reading, and GED. So, I went to somebody in administration and she said, “Let me look up the schedule of the previous teacher.” And so she says, “All right, you are doing this, this, and this.” And then it was, “Oh, OK, I think he left some things in the files, there.” If I hadn’t been a teacher – it was kind of jarring to think I had a week – that one week later I was going to be teaching five classes. There was no description. I had a list of the books he ordered and his course outlines. ...I acted like a substitute for that first term. I pretty much went by what he had left.

There was no description of the position, only a history of classes that the previous director had taught, and his course outlines. Fortunately, she was able to find course files, and work from what had been left, much like a substitute teacher, for that first term. As she began to get acquainted with her students and community, she didn’t feel confident that she knew as much as she needed to know, so she started to look for opportunities for professional development.

Sandra found online courses through Indiana School of Education that helped her identify and work with students with literacy difficulties, but it was two courses she found later in her

career through Johns Hopkins University that she found most helpful. In 2010, she was accepted into the first online course for “Mind, Brain & Teaching” (Johns Hopkins University, 2013), which she considered the most intensive professional development as it focused particularly on the cognitive processes of literacy and numeracy. Through these classes, Sandra felt that she became much more competent in her teaching. Understanding the cognitive processes for her students reading and numeracy difficulties helped her avoid feeling frustrated with them and she began to think more about what particular processes might be causing difficulty and started planning courses to more effectively help her students. She reflected:

There are people who just have so much trouble with processing difficulties and I was always frustrated because they don't have to tell you if they have been on an IEP or if they do, you don't know what, exactly, the problems may be. So for a number of years, probably almost ten, a lot of it was me trying to determine how much of their need was actual skills, and how much of it has to do with a processing difficulty. Then, what can I do to help them address that.

This added understanding and experience also provided her more boldness in asking her students about their experiences in learning, school, and even in their personal histories, to better understand how to teach them.

As a result of her added training, Sandra has continued to adapt her courses and program to meet student needs. When she took over the department about fifteen years ago, the curriculum was based on discreet skills, such as finding main ideas and identifying transitions in a paragraph. Since then, she has been working more on integrating reading and writing skills and finding authentic uses for their skills, such as how to approach textbooks and online reading content. In her position, she has worked full-time as a one-person department. About her

position, she says, “It’s a really nice find. I am learning how rare and wonderful that is,” even though at first it was just year-to year.

After listening to, and transcribing Sandra’s story, I realized that we had not talked about who might have mentored her, or if, perhaps, she had someone in a similar position that she could look to as a role model or example. In later conversations, she said there had really been nobody for her to follow. Her main source for setting a direction has been in the professional development through continuing education courses. She has continued to take courses, and is currently earning a doctorate in education.

At each stage where she made a major career decision, her main consideration was how to have financial stability through a full time job and benefits, and also to be able to enjoy a position congruent with her personal values, and a workplace where she could thrive. In her words, she needed to be able to “live with what she did”. The IRS, early in her career, provided the financial security, but it was not a match for her in that she hated the work. She loves where she lives and works now, and commented on how rare it is to find that kind of position as a developmental reading teacher.

Sandra shared openly about the combination of financial need and also needing to find a good match for her skills and values. She was straight-forward, and generous with additional conversations after our initial face-to-face meeting. After our first meeting, my mind felt full. Walking back to my car, I started thinking through her story, and how it would relate with my next participant’s story. Questions started to float around in the form of fragmented ideas, and I started to understand the process of narrative inquiry a bit more. Wanting to understand and experience the process, I sat with the thoughts and questions, letting them arise, unbidden, and made note of my thoughts. At the time, I wondered if there would be any answers, and whether

the interview with my next participant would raise similar thoughts. I made my notes, and prepared for meeting with the next participant, “Karen.”

### **Participant #2 – “Karen”**

My first meeting with Karen was in the food court of the campus where she teaches. She preferred to meet somewhere close to her office, to minimize time away from class preparation. Karen and I have met before, so recognizing her was not a problem. In the few minutes it took to greet, explain the project, and have Karen sign the informed consent letter, we realized that the food court would be too distracting, so we moved the interview to Karen’s office. Once there, we spread out the blank page and Karen selected a small collection of colored markers to create her timeline. She began to tell her story, using the guide questions as a reference.

Karen earned a bachelor’s degree in elementary education in the early 1970s, and the first teaching job she found was at a children’s home in the south, where she had students from first through sixth grade. There were only six or seven children, and each one was placed in the home because of some type of disability, so each one struggled with learning, and demanded individual attention. She noticed that one of the major areas they had learning problems was reading, and didn’t feel equipped with enough knowledge to help them, so after about four years, she went back to earn a master’s degree in reading. The degree was a one-year program that focused on initial reading skills, so it was directed for primary grades.

Once she had the master’s degree, Karen found a position teaching reading classes in a junior high setting. She worked with students in sixth through eighth grades who had been identified with special learning needs. This was a very difficult time for her, as she struggled to connect with the students, and to figure out the best ways to help them. It was during the years she struggled with the junior high students that Karen learned of developmental reading courses

in college. Once she heard of the position, she began sending out applications “everywhere” and was eventually hired by a college in Georgia. She recalled:

I was working in a junior high, which was awful for me. I was teaching reading classes, and these classes, the kids would come in and out. ...Most of the ones I had were ones who were struggling with reading, and how to connect to those students. In the middle of all this, I discovered that there are developmental reading classes at the college, so I just sent out applications everywhere and the reading teacher had a heart attack in class and died, and they needed someone like *then*. And I happened to have my application on file. It was one of those, get the call – can you come to work? So that’s how I got into teaching college.

Because her application was already on file, Karen was called when a teacher had a heart attack in class, and passed away. She recalls getting the call, asking how soon she could come to work. In the late 1970s she was able to teach developmental education in a regular four-year college. Up until this point, the only experience with college-level reading courses she had was teaching one speed-reading course at a community college. While very happy to be working with adults, the content was brand new, and she says, “I just didn’t know what I was doing.” So, she began to look at how developmental courses were being taught, and looking for resources in professional organizations. She has since benefited from joining the College Reading & Learning Association (CRLA) and the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE), but her first helpful introduction to professional associations was with the International Reading Association (IRA) that had a local group of instructors that taught at college level. For the first time, she was with a group of instructors that taught the same content and not only were they teachers, but they were also leaders in the field, some of whom had published

developmental education textbooks. Karen speaks of the group as “the women” and reflected that the group was, indeed, composed of all women.

After four or five years at the college, in the early 1980s, things began to change, and the college began to require doctorates of all instructors. Karen remembers there was a big conversation about whether or not a doctorate was necessary for developmental instructors or not, but to be safe, she began working on a doctorate. Without clear direction on which doctorate to work toward, Karen considered language arts as opposed to a more conventional English degree. She thought that in an English degree program would, the focus would be more on literature, but with language arts, she would learn more about reading, and have the opportunity to learn more about teaching reading. After making the decision to get started, it turned out that her doctorate was not to be. Karen got married and moved to New York.

In this next chapter of her life, Karen worked at two places, one four-year college, and one community college. She recalls a lot of driving during that time, to get from course to course, as she accepted assignments to cobble together a full time schedule from the two institutions. Karen recalls this time as when a major shift began in her approach to teaching. As she taught reading courses she was also teaching courses to education majors, which spurred her to think of what she would like her students to know about how to teach reading to their students. She credits a coworker who demonstrated such passion for students for inspiring her to focus more on students than content. She had small classes, which allowed her to focus on each student and zero in on what their individual needs were. She continued to teach and develop as a college instructor in the northeast until the late 1980s when her family moved to the Pacific Northwest.

Karen's first home in the Pacific Northwest was in Washington State, where she found a developmental reading position teaching at the main campus of a community college. She credits her time in Washington as the most influential in forming her foundational beliefs about developmental reading. While there, the state took a major interest in developmental education, and collected data from all of the community colleges, and provided opportunities for faculty to meet and focus on how to best meet reading needs. Up until this time, her approach to reading had been formed by a skills-based approach, but in Washington, she began to be more challenged by a more inclusive view of reading that was based on student needs rather than a list of discreet skills, such as finding a main idea, or how to look up a word in the dictionary. She saw the shift in assessment, in particular, from testing reading ability through a multiple-choice exam that could be graded by machine to more authentic forms that asked the student to read and reflect on what they could take away from their reading.

In 2001, Karen's family made one more move. During the same week that the United States was reacting to the events of September 11, Karen was moving to a new state, and to a new position in an Oregon community college. She is a full time developmental reading instructor at the main campus for one of Oregon's larger community colleges. She recalls that arriving there, she was somewhat disappointed to see that multiple choice exams were still the norm, but she also noted that the faculty was open and willing to adapt, especially with data available from Washington's efforts. She has, over the past twelve years, seen changes, and been able to nudge assessment, which is her particular area of interest, into more authentic and useful formats. She reflects:

I got hooked into the whole, bigger focus about, "Why does someone need to learn to read?" "What is it that is going to make it meaningful for them?" And to honor the

student; to honor the background they come with, and to honor what they have already accomplished in their lives and to honor them adults. What is it that they need? ...It may mean that reading is never something that they really love, and I want them to love to read, but it's more that they have the ability to take something and it can make sense. They can pull out what they need from it.

She is enjoying her position as a voice of authority that makes a difference in her institution. She is especially aware of this dynamic as she had spent years as an adjunct with little to no voice in curriculum and departmental direction.

As our time drew to a close, Karen spoke of her hopes for the future of developmental reading and her own aspirations, and how her own path unfolded. "For me, as a developmental instructor, most of the learning about it came through just years and years of doing it." She credits the professional organizations she joined for providing her with the most helpful training and networking opportunities to be able to do a job for which she felt she was not at all prepared when she began. She now helps screen and interview new instructors at her school, and said that it has always been a question of what to require of new instructors. This year they have begun to require a reading endorsement, but this is difficult, as community college instructors are not required to have a teaching license, and the way to get an endorsement is to first have a teaching license. She, and the department, have found that a degree in English does not necessarily translate to being able to teach reading. At least, she notes, that as her institution hires developmental reading they no longer presume that a masters' degree in any area at all, which shows that a person can read, is enough to hire someone to be a reading teacher. Being able to read well does not translate to being able to teach reading. She is looking ahead to new assessment criteria for funding that will be based on students' completion of programs. It is her

concern that the low percentage of full time instructors compared to adjunct may influence students, and the ability to recruit and retain instructors who will best help accomplish this mission.

Leaving her office, the mental image I had of the scope of developmental reading seemed to grow, as if the walls were being kicked out a bit, and light was shining into corners I hadn't yet considered. I also realized that at each step, it seemed she had made a very individual choice, and hadn't mentioned any mentor or role model, outside of the community of professional organizations. In following conversations we took up this subject, and Karen confirmed that at each step when she had a significant career decision to make, she knew what she wanted to do, but didn't have footsteps of a mentor to follow.

### **Analysis**

Once the stories are gathered, there is some tension in deciding first, how to analyze the data, and second, how to report the story. Lai (2010) discusses two levels of narrative analysis. First, the collection of a narrative life story, and second, how to take the story and put it into units of analysis, such as finding the context of time, place, and how one narrative fits into the story of another person. This fits with Clendenin and Connelly's (2010) concept of a three-dimensional space for interpreting the narrative. The goal is to give voice to experience, and while the small sample size makes it unreliable to generalize to a larger population, narrative inquiry analysis recognizes that each person's experience is part of something larger and more important than the immediate story in the here and now (Lai, 2010). Bamberg (2012) and Lai (2010) emphasize that narrative has been present throughout history, playing a central role in creating traditions. Bamberg (2012) identifies the elements of a narrative as the people (characters), action (events), and space and time across a sequence of events (temporality). The

narrative is how these elements are held together and the purpose of the narrative is to anchor the story and storyteller into the human experience.

At this point in the process, it seems that every researcher confronts the dilemma of how to report and interpret what has been collected (Clandenin & Connelly, 2000; Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). To simply tell the stories without placing them in larger context might allow important connections, or the essence of the story to be underestimated. On the other extreme, interpreting every detail, as if it were central, might overstate the exceptional nature or import of each story (Bamberg, 2012).

With the previously stated cautions in mind, this study needed to find its analytical voice. With such a small amount of narrative history or tradition to draw from, it seemed that the best contribution to the body of knowledge was to gather the stories, and focus analysis on what could be learned by putting the narratives from Sandra and Karen side by side. Looking at their stories, the following categories emerged:

- How they started their professional lives,
- How they discovered developmental reading as a career choice,
- How they see their positions in the present,
- How they envision the future of their careers.

**How they started their professional lives.** Both Sandra and Karen began their professional lives in careers other than teaching developmental reading to adults. They each earned a bachelor's degree. Sandra studied Spanish, and demonstrated a love of language, and Karen studied elementary education, thinking she would teach beginning language skills to children. Neither one was aware, at the beginning of her career, of the option of teaching reading in a

college setting. Sandra took additional training and went into the unrelated field of IRS auditing. Karen started out in education as an elementary school teacher.

**How they discovered developmental reading as a career choice.** As each of the participants developed into their careers, they found ways in which their initial positions were not the right fit for them. As they looked for change and growth, each one found out about developmental reading while pursuing something else. In Sandra's case, she was not thriving as a tax specialist. With her love of language and training in Spanish, she began to look for part time opportunities to utilize those skills. In addition to her professional unrest, Sandra was also facing changes in her family, causing her to relocate from California to Oregon. Before her move, she gained some experience teaching English to foreign students, so when she decided on a graduate program, she enrolled in an Oregon university, and worked in their English Language Institute while still a student. In Karen's case, her first placement with students in a home for special needs brought to her attention the need for additional training to address these students' particular needs. She realized how foundational reading was to their overall academic success, so when she pursued graduate education, it was to gain more specific skills in the area of reading. Her next assignment, with junior high students, was frustrating for her, and at that time she learned about opportunities teaching reading to college students.

**How they see their positions in the present.** Both Sandra and Karen felt a sense of discovery in learning that they were able to use their love of language and passion for helping students become better readers by teaching developmental reading in college. They each started teaching in a four-year college, but currently teach in community colleges. This transition was mostly due to the shift in higher education to move developmental courses out of the college and university setting to the community colleges. They each realized how uncommon it is for them

to be employed full time in a field where approximately 70% of instructors are hired as adjuncts (American Association of Community Colleges, 2010). Both expressed appreciation for their position, concern for their adjunct colleagues, but more important to each, was the impact on students of high instructor turnover. They shared a belief that one of the most important areas in which they have learned and developed professionally was the shift from the curriculum being the focus of their teaching to making the student the focus of how they plan and deliver content. Developing relationships with students, and creating a space where students feel safety and trust is, in their view, more difficult with adjunct faculty, and they each expressed how it is even more critical for struggling learners.

**How they envision the future of their careers.** Sandra and Karen both looked at where they are now as part of a larger picture, including where they have been, where they are now, how they each fit into a larger context, and how they see themselves developing through the rest of their careers. They are both taking leadership roles in their arenas, to use their experience and position to shape where they are, in consideration of the needs they address as instructors, balanced with additional stakeholders, and particularly requirements from the state. Sandra is particularly concerned with how to address changing standards due to the trend of adoption of “common core” curricula. Although the focus is currently on K-12, she has been informed that in Oregon, community colleges are looking at extending the system, and she is considering how to adapt her courses to integrate the possibility of these new standards, and still connect with the individual needs of students. Karen has been working on making changes in the style of assessment, to make it useful as an authentic learning experience for students in addition to generating data helpful for program decisions. Both Sandra and Karen are passionate about finding ways to connect classroom instruction with authentic reading needs and experiences.

They are both using skills-based curriculum to help students with particular needs, but not as the overall goal of their courses. Their focus is more on helping students learn what kinds of reading they will need to do in their academic or vocational settings, and helping them develop competencies to be successful. Discreet skills support the goal, as students learn to find main ideas, look up vocabulary, recognize transitions, and other specific tasks, but the goal is for students to be competent at the reading level they will need to achieve their life goals.

Noted mainly because of its absence, was any reference to a person, program, or established career path that either one of the participants could follow. It was not until after the initial conversation with each of them that I realized that neither one of them mentioned a particular certificate, diploma, role model, mentor, or other guidance in becoming a developmental reading instructor. Each of the participants learned of the position while preparing for something else. Sandra expected to teach ESL, and Karen expected to specialize in reading for children. It was on their path to something else, they were surprised to discover the opportunity to teach developmental reading in college. To make sure nothing was overlooked, we visited this subject in follow up conversations. Both Sandra and Karen emphasized that they did not have a role model or mentor. They were each hired into their first developmental teaching position because the person before them had suddenly left the position vacant, and they had to create their content from the resources that had been left by their predecessors.

Sandra found help in taking additional courses, and eventually found a certificate program that specialized in brain-based learning techniques. She has continued her professional development with ongoing participation in continuing education, and will earn a doctorate in education in the next year or two.

Karen found support in joining professional organizations. She started doctoral studies at one point, but found it was not as helpful as it seemed at first, and turned her focus to organizations such as College Reading & Learning Association (CRLA), International Reading Association (IRA), and the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE). She found the network of professionals in similar positions supportive and helpful, but did not find a particular program of study or individual that guided her toward becoming a developmental reading teacher.

When Sandra and Karen each reflected on their own background, how they became qualified for their current positions, and what they would look for in incoming instructors, they were unable to point to any one discipline or credential that would prepare one to teach developmental reading. Karen noted that her institution is beginning to require that developmental reading instructors have a reading endorsement, issued by TSPC (Teacher Standards and Practices Commission), the same authority that issues teaching licenses in Oregon; but this requirement may not work for community college instructors. One of the difficulties is that community college instructors are generally required to have a master's degree in their content area, but there is not a requirement that the teacher hold a teaching license. At the present time, the only way for one to earn a reading endorsement in Oregon is to first obtain a teaching license.

Both discussed how the ability to teach reading is not automatic, simply because one is a good reader. Neither one had a ready answer of how they would guide someone to become a developmental reading instructor. After some thought, Karen recommended becoming part of professional organizations. Sandra recommended that if one were to pursue graduate education

to prepare to teach reading, that the most useful courses are those that help understand the process of learning.

It is clear that both participants have demonstrated a lifelong passion for developmental reading. They share a commitment to continuing to develop as professionals and take on leadership roles and responsibilities that afford them the opportunity to shape the future of developmental reading in Oregon community colleges. Their combined years in their profession, with over ten years each in their current positions, lend weight and depth to their observations and opinions.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

#### **Summary**

By looking at the career paths of two developmental reading instructors in Oregon community colleges, this study, using narrative inquiry, set out to answer the following question, “How did the participants become developmental reading teachers in higher education?” The question came up because, as a developmental reading teacher myself, the position came as a professional surprise, a very pleasant surprise. Wanting to pursue professional development as a developmental reading instructor, I found there was little information available. I was curious about my colleagues. How did they get to where they were? Was there a more direct way, than the way I had gone? What could I have done earlier in my career to arrive more directly to the position? And, in a very practical vein, what could one do for professional advancement? It took some time for the question to emerge, as it is often difficult to see what is not there. Once the realization occurred, it seemed clear that there was a gap in the published research about how one becomes a developmental reading instructor.

#### **Discussion**

With so little published, it seemed that the best next step would be to begin to collect narratives of individuals who have navigated the same career path and achieved positions of leadership and responsibility as full-time instructors. The narrative inquiry method was selected, as it is recognized as a way to gather stories, especially the “how I became...” narrative (Bamberg, 2012).

After listening to their stories, while different, some areas of similarity emerged, leading to categories for analysis. The major findings were in the following four areas:

- How they started their professional lives. Both participants began in other careers, indicating that there is no one way to become a developmental reading teacher.
- How they discovered developmental reading as a career choice. Each participant was introduced to developmental reading while teaching in a related, but different field. In each case the discovery was a bit of a surprise.
- How they see their positions in the present. Participants offered rich reflections on their current positions, considering their particular stories, as well as how the field has evolved.
- How they envision the future of their careers. As experienced leaders, participants reflected on how they see the field developing, and they expect to participate in shaping the future.

**Integrating my own experience.** Listening to the participants, and particularly in the retelling through transcribing and analyzing their stories, I recognized a similar thread in my own experience. The purpose of this study was to listen to, and report on the stories of the participants, using their own voices as much as possible. With deliberate objectivity, I worked to faithfully report what the participants expressed. However, as a developmental reading instructor, it was also important to recognize the element of reflexivity, the recognition that it is impossible to completely remove oneself from the process. In analyzing the histories of the participants, four major thematic points emerged: How they started their professional lives, how they discovered developmental reading as a career choice, how they see their positions in the present, and how they envision the future of their careers.

Looking at the themes, my experience closely resembled that of the participants. They each started their professional life in a discipline different from adult developmental reading.

Sandra was an IRS official and Karen was an elementary school teacher. My undergraduate degree is in international business and economics, providing a connection with Sandra. I worked in refugee relief, assigned to Southeast Asia in the 1980s, and although I was not trained as an educator, in the spirit of “all hands on deck” that is emergency relief work, I wrote a curriculum for Vietnamese refugees to meet a very specific need. Their resettlement in the United States depended on their ability to show the ability to do certain basic tasks in English, such as applying for a drivers’ license and finding a job. My curriculum was for an intense English program, where students would focus exclusively on what we called “vocational English” for about six weeks, and prepare them for a screening exam they would need to pass for resettlement. For adoption of our curriculum, I had to appear before the refugee camp’s Supreme Commander as he was flanked by armed guards. He actually appreciated the proposal of a solution for one of his major problems at the moment, so even though I never lost the sense of intimidation from the distinctly military atmosphere, it went very well and my curriculum was adopted. Although my primary responsibilities remained administrative, I was assigned many training and orientation projects, such as supervising groups of college students that would volunteer throughout the year. Even though I had no training in education yet, I learned that, by nature, I was apparently a teacher, which my employers tended to recognize before I was fully aware of it.

Karen prepared for teaching younger children, only realizing after her initial preparation, the foundational importance of reading, and eventually her preference for working with adults. By the time I had children; I had come to embrace my inner teacher, and had delivered workshops in corporate settings on recognizing the specific learning styles and needs of individuals as the basis for workplace management decisions. I had also adapted the content into an in-service presentation for teachers, and was hired to direct the Christian education programs

for a Society of Friends (Quaker) church. I knew that with a bachelor's degree in business, my ability to grow as an educator was probably limited, but I hadn't decided whether or not to pursue graduate education. Just about that time, my daughter was struggling with learning to read and write in first and second grade. She was tested and we learned that although her reading and writing were at about Kindergarten level, her reasoning was beyond 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The assessment topped out at 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 9<sup>th</sup> month, and that was her score. We knew we had a special challenge, with such intelligence trapped by her limited ability to read and write. Her experience spurred me to research, and as I found ways to help her, and my son, who, at four years younger, had the same challenges. To help my own children, I travelled, took training, and became certified to deliver certain programs, but still had no accredited degree. As other parents found out what I had done, they asked if I could help their families, and my private practice took off. For about 8 years, I helped students with reading and learning disabilities. When teachers saw the improvement in students, both in their attitudes and their skills, they would ask if I could help them understand what had made the difference. I was interested in taking this next step, of interacting with schools, but without a teaching certificate, principals were not interested in having me present to their teachers. Over the years, I had taken an online graduate program and earned a master's degree in developmental and educational psychology, which I thought would be sufficient, but to present in schools it was clear I needed a teaching certificate. And I wanted to teach reading.

What I learned about Oregon is that reading is not a subject for which one can earn a teaching certificate. It is an endorsement that is added to a teaching certificate. I was advised to certify in something – anything – and then get the certification. I settled on Spanish, which was my undergraduate minor, and seemed that it would remain in demand, should I go ahead and

teach. I also wanted to work at the secondary level, as my interest was in helping students who had already struggled with reading, and provide assistance at a level where it seemed less prevalent. In 2008, I earned an initial teaching certificate, in Spanish, and in the spring of 2009, I added an endorsement as a Reading Specialist at the secondary level.

While still student teaching in a middle school, one of my responsibilities was to supervise my class while they visited booths for colleges and employers at a career fair in the gym. A casual conversation with the representative from one of the community colleges resulted in a call from the administrator, and within two days, I had been hired as a study skills and psychology instructor. I thought it was my master's degree in psychology that had opened the door, and perhaps it was, but what captured the administrator's interest was my training as a reading specialist. He said that psychology instructors were plentiful, but it was rare to find someone with credentials at a secondary level and with a passion to teach adults. My story synchronized with the participants in that we each began in another profession, and only learned about the possibility of developmental teaching for adults through some chance meeting, and we each were surprised with the opportunity.

I worked for six years as an adjunct, hoping each year that I would be able to move into a full-time position. Even though I was adjunct, I was regularly assigned a full course load, and one year I worked on a special waiver which allowed me a contract for the year and the same number of credits as a full time instructor, and then an overload because I was piloting a new program, and yet, I was not considered for a full-time position. In this, my story diverges from that of the participants. They were each hired into full-time positions. They observed that since they were hired, they have observed that opportunities for full time positions seem to have diminished, and it is quite rare now to find a full time position. On my campus, when I began in

2008, there were no developmental reading instructors. The reading instruction was done under the supervision of a GED instructor as a self-paced program. It was not working very well, as in order to do the steps in the program, the student had to already have a certain reading proficiency, and be comfortable with reading instructions, which in many cases, was the reason they were not succeeding already. I was given the opportunity to help initiate face-to-face reading courses as a pilot program. The first quarter we had a visiting instructor from the main campus who taught two courses at the same time, combining Reading 80 and Reading 90 with a total enrollment of about 12 students. The second quarter, it was my turn, and we separated the two classes, and in Reading 90 we had 25 students and about 15 students signed up for Reading 80. Since those beginning days, our reading program has grown to at least three full sections of each developmental reading course, and the addition of reading courses for transfer credit. I was one of four adjunct reading faculty, and despite the growth of the program, the growth in enrollment, and my experience in forming the program, the last conversation I had with my administrator about how to plan my professional development, he told me that, due to budget limitations, there was no expectation that any full time positions would be offered in developmental education. It was very discouraging to hear that despite my passion, experience, investment in the program, and relationships with students, there was essentially no hope for a career position with the school.

I started to look around and see where I might be able to pursue developmental reading in a full time position. My adjunct colleagues were doing the same. Of the four of us, one took a second adjunct position and currently teaches for two colleges, one left college instruction for a middle school position, one stayed at the college, and I moved out of state. Searching for a full-time position for myself resulted in a job, not for me, but for my husband. We moved out of

state in the last three months, and as hard as it was to leave my position, if there had been the chance of a full time position, I would have stayed. Actually, I would not have been job-hunting at all, so I am certain we would have remained in Oregon, but once the administrator confirmed the lack of a future for full time work, I realized that, as difficult as it was, I would need to be willing to look in other areas.

While my story is different in the aspect from the participants, I wonder if it may have something in common with other adjuncts. We have invested in training, we stick with teaching because we care about students, and in my case, even contribute to building the program in the institutions where we work, but remain with almost no voice as adjuncts are typically not included in program decisions. It is a frustration that perhaps leads to instructors giving up and moving to positions in other institutions, or perhaps leaving the profession entirely. I wonder if I had interviewed adjuncts rather than full-time instructors, what differences would be found. I wonder if we are losing a talent pool that could be contributing to the foundational literacy skills in our communities where it is most needed.

For the future, the participants find themselves in positions of leadership and with a voice to shape the discipline, within certain limits. They are bound by state expectations and limitations of budget and other decisions beyond their scope, but within their professional organizations and as members of college committees they have some opportunity to shape the future of developmental reading instruction. As adjuncts, our voice is all but extinguished. We are typically not included in campus decisions, limiting our effectiveness to our memberships in organizations outside of the school. It might be interesting to look deeper into this as a future study.

**What does this study mean to stakeholders?** Earlier, stakeholders were identified as those wishing to prepare developmental reading teachers, administrators tasked with making personnel decisions, agencies tasked with setting standards, prospective developmental reading teachers, the students in college-level developmental reading courses, and finally in a somewhat less direct way, the community. How might each of these groups use or respond to the information in this study?

First, for those interested in providing training and preparation to up-and-coming developmental reading teachers, this information may provide some insight into the needs of present instructors and what the participants found most helpful already. Both participants expressed a desire to understand the needs of students better, and for training that prepared them to meet student needs. One participant, Sandra, recommended preparation that focuses on how students learn, and the best ways to recognize various learning differences, and formulate strategies to work with individual strengths and challenges. Karen recommended putting attention into discerning the actual needs of students in a developmental reading program, and creating curriculum and materials with more authentic exercises and assessment, to more directly and effectively prepare students for their reading needs. Perhaps their stories could provide a place to start in beginning to design training programs for prospective teachers. The two programs discovered as part of the literature review (Sam Houston State University, 2013; Western Washington University/Woodring College of Education, 2013) might also be reviewed and analyzed to inform the formation of any training for Oregon community college reading instructors.

For administrators, particularly those who are tasked with staffing faculties and responsible for student outcomes on community college campuses in Oregon, this study may aid

in understanding how to review the employment histories of, and recruit, developmental reading instructors. Understanding the lack of formal preparation, and the avenues through which instructors discover the content area and career opportunities might help administrators design job descriptions and set criteria for incoming instructors that more effectively sort through prospective instructors and reflect the needs of the institution and its students. Each participant was hired because they had some of the skills requested in the job description, and they were willing to step into a position with substantial unknown elements. Sandra's position included GED instruction and developmental reading, which was outside of her experience in English and developmental writing, and Karen was new to the instruction of adults. Perhaps this study could help by showing that it may be common for applicants for a new position may possess some, but not all, of the desired experience and credentials. If this is frustrating, and I imagine it might be, as administrators have to sort through each individual set of disparate qualifications, it might nudge them to advocate for some type of certification that would simplify their search process.

In addition to recruiting to establish a faculty for students, administrators are also responsible for performance criteria. They must work within a limited budget, established by the state, which may encourage the practice of using mostly adjunct faculty. Adjuncts are simply less expensive to hire. However, administrators are also responsible for reporting on the success of programs at each campus, and perhaps the experience and insight of these participants may inspire administrators to look at the balance between the use of adjuncts, for budgetary reasons, and the establishment of a more permanent faculty, which might result in improved student performance as it provide the opportunity for more mentoring relationships between students and faculty.

For those whose responsibility it is to establish credentialing and performance criteria, perhaps this study might help bring some understanding to the role of developmental reading instructors. In Oregon, perhaps the authority for standards and practices (TSPC) could look at the requirements for reading specialists, and evaluate how they K-12 reading specialist may, or may not, be qualified as an instructor for adults, and consider whether or not to adopt minimum requirements for community college instructors. Both participants expressed that being able to read at a college level is not enough to ensure that one will be an adequate instructor of reading. There is a need for particular training in the mechanics of reading as well as training in how to create curriculum, deliver instruction and assess student performance. It is clearly a small start that would require wider research before adopting any set criteria.

For those who might want to, but are not yet teaching developmental reading, it might be helpful to understand that they are entering a field where they will need to be willing to blaze their own trail. Knowing ahead of time that those who have gone before have had to find their own way, and creatively put to use any professional resources they are able to leverage into professional preparation and development. Lacking standardized certification and training, at least at the present time in Oregon, preparation to teach and ongoing development is currently left to each individual to craft a program. In this study, one participant chose to go the route of formal classroom instruction and the pursuit of an advanced degree, after she was hired as a developmental reading teacher. The other participant chose not to pursue a formal advanced degree, but joined professional organizations, and continued learning through participating in ongoing research, discussions and training. Knowing these two avenues of professional preparation and development may be helpful to aspiring developmental reading instructors.

For students, this study revealed how committed the participants are to creating a student-centered learning experience that meets students' authentic needs. As more is learned about what works best for students, and teachers are given access to training in best practices, the results should be observable in improved student performance outcomes. One of the concerns that each participant expressed was for the high turnover due to a high percentage of adjunct instructors in community colleges (American Federation of Teachers AFL-CIO, 2010). Perhaps the voices of these participants will be heard as they speak for the hiring of permanent instructors to provide continuity and stability in a students' experience. If the role of the developmental reading instructor is considered worthy of more full-time and permanent faculty positions, students will benefit by being able to develop relationships with instructors who can provide mentoring relationships throughout their course of study. This might result in a higher percentage of students who begin a program, seeing it through to completion. Both participants mentioned that community colleges are shifting focus from how many students are enrolled, to measuring efficacy according to how many students complete their program. If this is the case, perhaps an adjustment in the hiring practice of developmental reading teachers would result in improved student retention and performance outcomes.

Finally, and in a somewhat indirect way, perhaps, the community, and even society in general, is also a stakeholder. As education is made accessible for those who may, for any variety of reasons, not consider a four-year degree, community college provides an opportunity for community members to step into higher education. Some discover their abilities, and develop the disciplines necessary to either enter the workforce as a more well-prepared employee or business owner, and some discover that they are capable of continuing into even more higher education. In their stories, each participant discussed a time when they realized how critical it is

for students to become readers, whether they pursue a vocational certification or a transfer degree that opens the door to more advanced academic work. Reading, they advocated, is a make-or-break skill that can open the doors for students, or discourage them to the point of giving up. Clearly, the community has an interest in providing education to its members, and this study may indicate that the community may particularly benefit from high-quality developmental reading instructors.

**Reflection on narrative inquiry method.** This study presented the opportunity to look, not only at the career paths of two developmental reading teachers, but also to explore narrative inquiry as a research method. Prior to taking graduate education courses, my exposure to research had been almost exclusively quantitative, and a look back at what I was studying and reading at the time reflects a strong bias that quantitative was rigorous and scientific, while qualitative methods were soft and unscientific. Passion for the research question provided the needed impetus for moving forward, one wavering step at a time, into narrative inquiry.

The initial phase of preparing for this study was to first get acquainted with the method, which has been a revelation. I went ahead with the attitude that I would trust the method, even though it seemed somewhat thin to collect stories from only two participants. My skepticism was further fueled as it seemed that the scope of the study, the career path, might not provide enough for a rich analysis. As participants drew their timelines, it seemed such a simple task at the time. It was during the transcription that the depth and richness of the stories began to take hold. The timelines, which seemed so simple at the time, proved invaluable as they were referred to over and over, providing context and organization. The learning in this project was on two levels, the research question itself, and the process of narrative inquiry. It has been a deep and rich experience.

As Sandra and Karen told their stories, they wove the events of their history with their understanding and point of view. They discussed what happened, and when, and added the layers of why they made certain decisions, and what guides their current decisions that will influence their future. Their narratives are colored by the passion they have for helping their students succeed, growing in their profession, and how the field will look, going forward. The depth of their stories took me somewhat by surprise, as the strategy of trusting the method gave me an experience of unexpected richness and depth.

**Recommendations for further research.** For further research, this study may help show interest or need to understand more about the profession of teaching developmental reading. The nature and scope of this study are not useful for any generalization, but perhaps this work could provide a sort of pilot study for forming questions or designing surveys to learn more about developmental reading teachers. If we understand more about how people are coming to the profession, it might provide information helpful in developing policy, such as recruiting and retention, for institutions.

The opportunity for teachers to find full-time work emerged as a major concern, as both teachers are part of a small percentage of the teachers in their profession. Concerns for delivering quality education to students, and honoring additional stakeholders in the community college system, such as employers, and taxpayers might nudge further research into the analysis of full-time versus relying on adjunct instructors.

Finally, this study was limited to full-time instructors. One part-time instructor was interviewed, but the results were not analyzed for this study. With part-time and adjunct instructors teaching the majority of developmental reading courses in Oregon, the next logical

step would be to complete a study with part-time instructors, then compare the data from part-time and full-time faculty.

On the surface, this project has a simple purpose, to learn what we can about the career paths of developmental reading instructors in community colleges in Oregon by analyzing the histories of two full-time instructors. Studying these histories provided rich background information on two individuals, but with such a small number of participants, it is impossible to generalize beyond the individual stories. However, as certain threads emerged, providing a framework for analysis, and enough background to begin to formulate questions that, when researched, may provide information that is more useful for generalizing, and thus, in helping to shape policy and decisions affecting the profession of developmental reading instruction.

Using the framework developed from the participants' stories as an outline, some areas of future research might be

- How they started their professional lives:
  - Is it generally the experience of developmental reading teachers to begin in a different profession, as the participants did?
  - Which, if any, professions lead to becoming a developmental reading instructor?
  - What were developmental reading teachers searching for in a career when they began their professional lives? Did they know they wanted to teach?
  - If it were a more well-known option, would substantial numbers of prospective teacher choose to direct their path toward developmental reading in college?
- How they discovered developmental reading as a career choice:
  - Is the experience of the two participants and the researcher the norm, that the opportunity to teach developmental reading came as an unexpected opportunity?

- Is the teaching of developmental reading being promoted as a profession?
- How are developmental reading teachers recruited? Is it effective?
- How well-understood is the position of developmental reading instructor?
- Would developmental reading instruction benefit from some kind of promotion?
- How would one develop a developmental reading instructor course for certification?
- How they see their positions in the present:
  - How do full-time and adjunct instructors compare?
    - Are their backgrounds similar or different as a group?
    - Are student outcomes different as the result of having full-time or adjunct instructors?
    - Are their career goals the same?
    - Are adjuncts looking for full-time work?
    - What is the cost and benefit comparison of hiring full-time versus adjunct faculty, in terms of dollars and student achievement.
- How they envision the future of their careers:
  - What is the future for developmental reading? Will it be necessary?
  - Will demand grow or diminish?
  - How can instructors be more effectively trained and prepared for teaching reading to adults?
  - If there is a talent drain, due to lack of full-time opportunities, how will that affect developmental reading programs?

These are questions that, throughout the course of this study, I wished there had been time to look into more deeply. As community colleges in Oregon continue the mission of outreach in communities and to students who may need a little something extra to reach their educational goals, the future of developmental education seems to be of foundational importance, and the skill of reading is among the most basic of skills that can insure, or undermine, success. It is my hope that this study may plant a seed that inspires the next step, and as a result, students will have access to excellent instruction, and teachers will find respect and rewards in their careers, and our communities will reap the rewards.

This project has moved me to consider my own role in the future of developmental reading. Inspired by the participants, I hope to bring attention to the preparation, recruiting, and development of developmental reading instructors. I believe that all of the stakeholders are best served by providing students with the best opportunity to read comfortably at a functional level. An element of that opportunity for students is access to teachers who are passionate about reading, with a strong sense of excellence in their profession. I also believe that a shift from the dependence on adjunct and part-time instructors at such a high level to more full-time positions for developmental reading instructors will provide students with better instruction, as they enjoy the benefit of stability and continuity, and teachers have the opportunity to invest in programs where they are teaching. I think this will ultimately move institutions closer to their goals of seeing students complete the programs they begin. The time is right for the field of developmental reading to be brought to the attention of administrators, policymakers, and other leaders in education, and I hope this work provides openings for important conversations.

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## Appendix A – Sample Letter of Consent

Month, Day, 2013

Participant's Name

Address

City, ST, Zip

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I write requesting permission to interview you for a research project necessary to complete my Doctor of Education degree. Since January 2009, I have pursued classes through the School of Education at George Fox University. The last step in completing this degree is writing a dissertation based on the results of a study that I personally perform. In performing the research and writing of this dissertation, I intend to explore the career paths taken by professionals who are currently teaching developmental reading in higher education.

My plan is to interview developmental reading teachers from community colleges in Oregon. The interviews will be conducted in two parts, each lasting about 90 minutes and will include questions about the background, career choices, and outside influences that have resulted in your current position. I will not ask any questions that are potentially embarrassing and will insure privacy both in the interview itself and afterwards. Please know that participation in this interview is voluntary. I will only interview if you are personally willing and grant permission.

All information gathered from this project will go through a detailed analysis performed by me. No one else will have access to the generated material. At no point during the process or in the final paper will I identify the participants. In addition, three years after completion of the dissertation, I will personally destroy all consent forms and recorded interviews.

Please do let me know if there are any questions about this letter or my doctoral program. In addition, you are welcome to contact the person at George Fox University who will most closely supervise my work. Her name is Dr. Beth LaForce and you can reach her at 503/554-2833 or [blaforce@georgefox.edu](mailto:blaforce@georgefox.edu). I am optimistic that the information learned from this research will prove beneficial to individuals and the community at large. Thank you for considering my request.

If you agree to participate, please provide your signature on the attached copy and return that form to me.

Sincerely,

Dana Sitton Anderson

503/925-8841

[danderson07@georgefox.edu](mailto:danderson07@georgefox.edu)

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## **Appendix B – Interview Guide Questions**

### **To the participant:**

The purpose of this interview is to have you tell your story. I have a few questions to guide us, but mainly, I want to hear the story of how you came to teach developmental reading to adults in higher education. I have a few questions to guide us, but please feel free to simply tell your story. If we discover something that isn't covered in the questions, we can certainly add it to the inquiry.

This interview is the starting point. If we find that it would be helpful to meet again, or if you think of more things that you would like to add, we can certainly meet again to make sure your story is as complete and well-told as possible.

### **The Main Question:**

How did you become a developmental reading teacher in higher education?

### **Additional Questions:**

1. What, in your personal life, led you to a career in teaching reading?
2. Please describe the professional path that led you to this position
3. Looking at critical moments when you needed to make a career decision, how did you make those choices?
4. What outside influences shaped your decisions? Perhaps things such as the economy, job opportunities, location, family life, etc., but if you think of anything else, I would welcome any insight and comment.
5. What do you 'do' as a reading teacher that's in your job description?
6. What do you 'do' as a reading teacher that is not in your official job description?
7. What is it like for you in your position?
  - a. What rewards keep you there?
  - b. What do you find difficult or discouraging?