NOVICE TEACHERS’ STORIES REPRESENTED AS A GRAPHIC NARRATIVE

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Thesis Prepared for Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2013

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The issue of alternative certification teacher training has greatly affected art education over three decades. As a result of training through alternative certification, many art educators enter the profession unprepared and unable to cope with the realities of teaching. This study attempts to understand and represent the experiences and struggles of four alternatively certified art teachers, including myself. By reading these stories, others within the education community can empathize with and provide support for struggling novice teachers.

This creative thesis uses a graphic novel format to represent participants’ stories. By combining text and imagery, the graphic novel format provides different meanings, interpretations, and insights into the teachers’ lives. This medium offered a unique and rich perspective on the stories of what it is like being an alternatively certified art teacher.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Dr. Kalin for providing me with the opportunity to write this thesis and for her support throughout my graduate experience. I also want to thank my better half, Emily Kennedy, for her patience and love throughout this process.
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PART I

CRITICAL ANALYSIS
Introduction

This research project is a result of over seven years in the field of education and three years of academic study in an art education master’s program. My field experience showed me how difficult art teaching can be, especially when you do not feel fully prepared as a curriculum writer, content presenter, or guide for student learning. In graduate school, I learned how to better approach these difficult areas of teaching and gained confidence I had not previously possessed. I believe beginning teachers with no formal art education training and minimal education in general teaching practices are ill-prepared for the challenges of art education.

“Minimal” refers to alternative certification programs, which, in many cases, are marginally effective at preparing teachers for the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Fenstermacher, 1990; Humphrey, Wechsler, & Hough, 2008). I personally possess a similar background, having originally graduated from an alternative certification program. While all art educators start as novices, regardless of training, those who begin teaching art without extensive training are more vulnerable to the problems that are more likely to occur during an educator’s first years of teaching.

The purpose of this study is to gain understanding into the contexts and meanings of alternatively certified art teachers’ experiences. I accomplished this through collecting, analyzing, and re-presenting our stories using narrative inquiry to create awareness, empathy, and urgency to support such minimally trained novice educators. Narrative itself is a way of making sense of the world around us and is an act of knowing and developing meaning for individuals (Bruner, 1986). As Clandinin and Connelly (2006) explain, people shape their lives around such stories, specifically influenced by their past experiences, to construct their identities (p. 477). In order to convey information and expand interpretive possibilities, the collective
narrative result of this research is represented as a graphic novel, using combined text and imagery in a deliberate sequence (McCloud, 1993). I hope that by listening to and interpreting novice art teacher stories, administrators and art educators can create entry-points into the field of art education specifically for teachers, like me, who need support. Along with professional educators, this study also creates a means for individuals outside of professional education to better understand and empathize with the plights of novice teachers.

Research Questions

This study focuses on three questions regarding the content, influence, and form of the collective, represented narratives. The research questions are general and open-ended to create flexibility and possibilities for both the participants and the resulting structure of the represented narratives.

Because stories help us make sense of the world around us (Bruner, 1986), the main research question revolves around narrative: What stories might art teachers, who started with little or no formal art education training, tell about their beginnings as teachers? While addressing the specific population, the question does not limit the content of the narratives and allowed participants to subvert the interview process and tell the stories they found most meaningful. In addition to the main research question, the first supporting question addresses the form of the re-presented narrative: How might visual and textual media be employed in the representation of these narratives to affect the meanings, interpretive possibilities, and insight into participants’ stories? This question investigates the use of graphic narratives in storytelling and how they differ from more traditional forms of communicative media and text. The second supporting question addresses the impact of these narratives on education: How might our stories
inform art education in terms of understanding and supporting minimally trained teachers? Here, art education refers to the educational community, such as teacher preparation programs and governmental bodies, and their involvement in training and supporting novice visual art teachers.

Background to Problem

When I first conceived of this research topic, I was an administrator at a small urban charter school in Texas, where I also served as head of the art department and taught high school art class a few times per week. I started as a teacher’s aide six years before, became a full-time art teacher the following year, and slowly transitioned into administration over the next four years while retaining my ties to the classroom. Near the beginning of this experience, I went through a general (non-art specific) alternative certification program. I share my experiences in an alternative certification program to shed light on what could be considered the atypical nature of alternative certification, as explained in the literature review (see below). I also share the story of my experiences at the charter school and in my current situation at a public high school in order to give context to the reasons why I chose this research and to clarify my relationship with research participants.

Alternative certification.

After first serving as a teacher’s aide and being offered a job as an art teacher, I decided to become certified through an alternative program. This decision was based less on my need for job security or a higher salary and more on a desire to fill the knowledge gaps in my approaches to teaching. I applied to a for-profit program based on the advice of my colleagues and was accepted for their year-long program. The training portion of the program was three weeks in
the summer. I spent the first week with all the secondary teachers (anywhere from 80-100 individuals), being trained on lesson-planning and delivery, classroom management, and learning theories such as Bloom’s taxonomy (Atherton, 2011). The following two weeks were spent with everyone in the program (over 300 individuals) in a cafeteria listening to speeches from principals, politicians, and even an education author. These speeches were meant to inspire the audience, but contained very little practical advice on the roles, responsibilities, and realities of teaching. Similar to a program found by Wilson, Floden, and Ferrin-Mundy (2002), attendance of the three-week training was the basis for course completion. There were no coursework requirements for the program and no specialization training in the arts whatsoever.

After the three-week program, I began my internship phase as an art teacher at the charter school, in which I was observed three times during the school year by a retired educator, contracted by the program. The observations lasted around an hour and his feedback was somewhat constructive and usually accompanied by a one-page carbon copy of his comments. However, for one observation he showed up on the wrong day (during a time I was not teaching), realized his mistake, and gave me a good review despite not actually observing me.

Within the program’s internship phase, there were at least two study sessions offered during the year for the Pedagogy and Professional Responsibilities (PPR) test, which I did not attend. The test itself is a requirement for all Texas teachers and does not cover specific content areas. There were no study sessions offered by the program for specific content-oriented tests such as the visual arts. When I finished the program, I felt no more knowledgeable than before, except that I was now armed with a piece of paper stating my qualifications to teach. My role at the charter school, however, became much larger over the next few years and the knowledge gap
I had originally hoped to fill only seemed to widen. For this reason, I applied for graduate school in art education and made supporting the charter school’s art teachers one of my main priorities.

Urban charter school.

The school I worked for was formed and maintained purposefully different from traditional public schools and suffered many of the inadequacies independent charter schools encounter (Finn, Manno, & Bierlein, 1996). The student population was predominately low income and the infrastructure of the school was always in flux. There was constant teacher turnover and many educators were hired with little to no experience. One of the many positive aspects of the school was the dominant inclusion of art education throughout all the grade levels. I had the unique pleasure and opportunity to be the first full-time art teacher and helped develop the program to its current point, employing five full-time art teachers spanning Grades K-12.

During my four years in administration there, I hired nine different art teachers, none of whom had educational experience beyond some student teaching. They all possessed various backgrounds in the studio arts and passed the state required content exams that qualified them for the positions. Three of the teachers graduated with degrees in art education, one with a master’s and two with bachelor’s degrees. The other six were certified through alternative programs, either recently finished or completing the last stages of their program when hired. These six teachers consistently struggled with content, classroom management, and, most importantly, flexibility and creativity in teaching methods. Their instruction involved imparting knowledge to students as passive learners and was typically in the form of project procedures, giving strict instructions on how to execute an artwork. They lacked the ability to construct curriculum beyond individually conceived projects to the point where lessons were isolated and unrelated to
each other. These teachers clung desperately to “what worked,” which in most cases were projects and lessons that kept the students quiet and produced artworks that were aesthetically pleasing to parents and school administrators. In many ways, their beginning in art education mirrored my own. We did not possess the theoretical or pedagogical background gained in traditional certification training.

It should be noted that I recently left the charter school. I resigned because of the fluctuating and chaotic nature my administrative position and the operation of the school itself. When I left only two of the art teachers I originally hired, none of whom possessed art education degrees, still remained at the school.

Current situation.

At the end of my time at the charter school, over a year ago, I moved to a different area of Texas and returned to teaching art full-time. My new school is a large, rural public school in a growing suburban district. I am one of three art teachers on a staff of over 140 teachers, administrators, and support staff, in a district of almost 3,000 employees. The students (mostly middle- to high-income), administration, and culture of the school are foreign to me and the dissimilarity with my previous environment is pervasive.

In simple terms, I am experiencing the common anxieties many go through when starting a new job. Fitting into a role and adapting to the dynamics of a new setting is never easy. In this case, however, I am making a transition few people within education typically make. I am moving from administrator back to teacher, in a completely different school environment. Before, I barely had the chance to be a novice teacher when I was quickly promoted to administration. Now that I have returned to teaching, I am not only again encountering the
strange trappings of being perceived as a classroom teacher again, but I have become engrained in the insecurities, anxieties, and exhaustion of being a novice. In so many ways, I have become (and arguably never stopped being) the very type of teacher that I wished to help as an administrator.

In addition my new position has helped me empathize with and approach other art teachers in a way that was not afforded to me as an administrator. Rediscovering the experience of being a new teacher, in an environment that has redefined my perception of teaching, helps me empathize and understand the position of the participants in my study. In addition, this rearrangement of perspective places me at the center of my research. I am an art teacher with only 3 to 4 years of actual teaching experience. My new situation has embedded a sense of urgency for me within this research, and my personal story is now an integral part of the overall, combined narrative within this study.

Justification

My new job, combined with my previous teaching and supervisory experiences provided my biggest motivations for undertaking this research. Beginning to teach is in many ways about survival. As Nadine Kalin mentioned, “Teachers tend to teach the same way they were taught” (personal communication, 2010) and I argue this is especially true for those possessing little formal educational training. When I began teaching, I often taught with the same approaches used by my teachers in grade school and college. It was not until graduate school that I began to understand the theory behind art education and realized the multitude of approaches and possibilities I could utilize.
Those teachers I supervised, who only went through alternative certification as an avenue to teaching, were usually inflexible and unprepared for the complexities of art education. I have found this true for many teachers, both within art and other subject areas (Koballa, Glynn, Upson, & Coleman, 2005; Kowalchuk, 1999). As a result of these factors and others, Darling-Hammond (2000) found 60% of alternatively certified teachers leave education by the end of their third year, as opposed to 30% of traditionally trained teachers. Keeping that in mind, the State Board of Education (Ramsay, 2011) online data indicates the number of teachers in Texas completing alternative certification held steadily at around 52% in 2009 and 2010, the last two years available in the completed study. This represents a significant portion of Texas teachers who could leave their jobs within the next few years. Not only is this disturbing for those trying to enter the teaching field, but it represents a significant cost for schools (Texas Center for Educational Research, 2000) and the quality of education within them.

By discovering the context surrounding novice art teachers’ curricular and classroom decisions, development, and needs, educational institutions such as alternative certification programs, could better understand and support these types of teachers. Specifically, by listening to pre-service and on-the-job teacher experiences, supporters may ascertain gaps in development or avenues of improvement for teachers. This can raise awareness and increase knowledge regarding issues such as improving the effectiveness of training for art teachers, increasing teacher retention, and cutting down on attrition costs.
Literature Review

While my experiences with alternative certification represent a more personal understanding, the literature review gives more generalized, abstracted information on such programs in order to help contextualize this study. The first part of the review gives further background to my research topic by describing traditional and alternative certification. The second part examines specific areas of preservice education and novice teaching, showing how they relate to and differ from my research.

Traditional Certification

In order to fully understand alternative certification, we must first look at how traditional teacher programs prepare and support novice teachers for both general and art education. Most traditional education programs involve four years of coursework including specialization classes in both content and pedagogy (Jeanneret, Brown, Bird, Sinclair, Imms, Watkins, & Donelan, 2006). In generalist programs for elementary classroom teachers, universities typically provide some form of fine art coursework (Latta & Thompson, 2010). However due to time constraints, art education often becomes a minimal aspect of teacher training (Jeanneret et al., 2006, p. 80) and programs opt for other topics like reading, math, and science.

Traditional art education programs share similar elements with general education degrees, including field experiences, teacher mentoring, and specialized coursework requirements (Zimmerman, 1994), though programs do vary in terms of specific requirements (Carroll, 2010; Galbraith, 1997). The College of Visual Arts and Design (CVAD) (CVAD website, 2011) at the University of North Texas (UNT) offers a traditional art education degree, which requires over 80 hours of art criticism theory and practice, art history, aesthetics, studio
art, and professional development including student teaching in both elementary and secondary classrooms. The standards of UNT and other art education university programs mirror those laid out by the National Art Education Association (NAEA) in terms of preparation expectations for highly qualified teachers (NAEA, 2009). These expectations include a focus on content, theory and practice, and faculty expertise in order to further professionalize the field of art education.

Schools of education (both art and general) argue the professionalization of teachers is essential and requires “grounding in the profession’s methodology and applications through extended supervised practice” (Brewer, 2006, p. 272). Preservice teachers must be fully prepared through rigorous coursework before stepping into the classroom. Even in the classroom they should be supervised in order to better understand and reflect on their roles as teachers. These ideals and others associated with traditional certification stand in sharp contrast to those of alternative certification.

One study worth mentioning within the scope of traditional certification is Diblasio’s (1997) national survey, which catalogued and compared certification requirements and standards for art education. Despite being more than 15 years old, the survey gives a good sense of each state’s requirements for art teacher certification. While a small portion of respondents gave no specific requirements for certification (New Jersey and Louisiana), all other states required some form of art specific coursework, including studio hours, art appreciation, and art history. Some were even specific within these categories. Only 42% of states reported requirements of art education or arts methods coursework and only 46% explicitly mentioned clinical experience requirements.

This survey works almost solely under the assumption that these are requirements completed through institutions of higher learning, at the university level. Only once does
Diblasio (1997) mention alternative certification: “Communication and collaboration are particularly challenged in states recognizing alternative forms of licensure that circumvent college and university programs” (p. 96). Since this survey, alternative certification has grown into a much more complicated and pervasive aspect of teacher education.

Alternative Certification

Alternative certification encompasses all certification routes outside of traditional programs, with the exception of emergency certification (Fenstermacher, 1990). The National Center for Education Information (2006) (NCEI) website lists 11 types of alternative certification. They can vary greatly in terms of timeframe and degree of educational rigor. They are offered by a myriad of agencies including school districts, post-baccalaureate university programs, for-profit agencies, community colleges, and regional education centers (Zientek, 2007). Common elements of alternative certification programs include shorter timeframes for completion, cheaper program costs, and less coursework than traditional programs. The following is general information and criticisms of alternative certification.

Alternative certification became part of the educational landscape during the early 1980s in the United States as a result of teacher shortages and shifting education policy (Dial & Stevens, 1993) away from traditional university programs. Among the political and practical purposes behind its creation, some of the hopes included bringing in people with content experience outside of education (specifically in the math and science fields), increasing choice for those wanting access to jobs, and raising standards for teacher preparation (Bradshaw, 1998; Brewer, 2006; Fenstermacher, 1990; Shen, 1997; Zumwalt, 1996). Unfortunately, many programs have simply become a way for people, specifically recent college graduates, to
circumvent traditional routes (Shen, 1997). Investment of time, money, and work is substantially less in alternative programs versus traditional ones, making them very attractive to people searching for employment and those proponents looking to capitalize on the growing popularity of alternative certification programs. As mentioned earlier, more than half of Texas’ teachers are currently going through alternative routes and leaving the teaching profession earlier, emphasizing Brewer’s (2006) point that many of these participants have “little interest in teaching while in college, and… [are] looking for stopgap employment” (p. 282). Because of this, alternative certification has actually hurt standards for certification, forcing university programs to hybridize their programs in order to compete, leaving “the quality of graduate preparation… incrementally diminished” (Brewer, 2006, pp. 282-3).

This is not to say all alternative certification programs are of poor quality, but researchers have pointed out why many programs are ineffective in preparing teachers (Brewer, 2006; Fenstermacher, 1990; Humphrey, Wechsler, & Hough, 2008; Wilson et al., 2002). Fenstermacher (1990) argues that because alternative certification is less extensive in terms of professional training, teachers are not capable of acquiring “the sophisticated traits and capacities that cultivate discernment and the ability to practice reflectively” (p. 171). Reflexivity provides individuals the ability to look at their own actions critically, assess their decisions, and dispassionately decide how to improve themselves. It allows teachers the freedom to critically discern what is working and what is not within the context of their classroom and situation. This trait is fostered in traditional programs through extended, rigorous coursework and field-experience. Alternatively certified teachers, however, do not gain the valuable skills inherent in learning the theories behind practical actions and thus can only deal with classroom issues on a superficial level (Fenstermacher, 1990). These teachers cannot adapt the practical techniques
learned in alternative certification programs to their particular teaching environment because they lack a theoretical background and skills, including reflexivity.

In addition to the lack of content and skills that alternative programs provide, Humphrey, Wechsler, and Hough (2008) describe the diversity of entrants’ educational and occupational backgrounds as a reason for the ineffectiveness of alternative certification programs. Too many people are admitted into alternative programs at various academic and experiential levels, due to lenient admission requirements. This places the burden on the programs’ instructors to meet everyone’s needs, a goal most instructors cannot hope to fulfill (Humphrey, Wechsler, & Hough, 2008, p. 8).

It should be mentioned that alternative certification does open doors for those from other areas, such as studio art, to become teachers. Particularly pertinent to visual arts education, visiting artists are currently recognized in a report by the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (Dwyer, 2011) as a valuable resource in the classroom. These artists “introduce students to the life of a working artist, often serving as role models for aspiring young artists, and connect students and schools to community resources” (Dwyer, 2011, p. 41). It does occur to me, however, that even though artists are considered professionals, alternative certification does more to de-professionalize the field of art education. Many of these working artists want more access to teaching, but do not possess the skills and knowledge of art specialists. Alternatively prepared teachers coming from subject related fields have been found to have lower scores on preparation tests, than their traditional trained counterparts and only enter the profession because of job availability (Brewer, 2006, p. 276). These are just a few of the issues complicating teacher preparation in today’s education system.
It is worth noting that many believe alternative certification is here to stay and much of current research is focusing on how to improve such programs (Humphrey et al., 2008; Zientek, 2007) including increased coordination and collaboration between alternative and traditional certification programs (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2009). Other options are being explored as well. One example of this is the teacher residency program (Kee, 2011). This concept, introduced in 2008 gives teachers the option to work part-time their first year, while receiving part-time training and mentorship with a master teacher in their subject area. For many in the debate on teacher training, teacher residency represents a middle-ground approach between traditional and alternative programs (Kee, 2011, p. 24).

The point of my research and sharing my personal experience is not to condemn alternative certification programs as a whole. Rather, it is meant to provide insights and empathy for those charged with training and supporting such educators.

Preservice Art Education

In addition to literature describing traditional and alternative certification, several recent studies regarding preservice art training and novice art teaching experiences relate closely to my research. One study commonly linked to my own is Grauer’s (1998) investigation of preservice art teacher beliefs. Her case study of elementary generalists and secondary art specialists in a rigorous one-year post-baccalaureate university program shows specifically how teachers’ beliefs toward art education play an enormous role in how they teach, or even if they teach, art. Understanding the context of art teachers’ previous experiences and attitudes toward art education can help teacher preparation programs better address the needs of students and “inculcate and foster beliefs about the values of art education” (Grauer, 1998, p. 351). It can also
help teachers be reflective of their experiences and consider how the program might have changed those beliefs.

Grauer (1998) studied a range of beliefs based on preconceived notions of preservice art teachers, the beliefs traditional art education programs attempt to foster, and the teachers’ beliefs challenged by these programs. Some teachers come into the profession with no preconceived notions of what art teaching is or should be; others believe art teaching should be strictly content-oriented, as opposed to student-oriented. Only after they completed their program were such beliefs strengthened, challenged, and supplemented through coursework and practicum (Grauer, 1998, pp. 356-61).

My study focuses on those teachers who had no preparation in art education per their certification training. If the idea of university preservice art education, according to Grauer (1998), is to bring art teachers’ beliefs and values in line with the field of art education, what happens when art teachers are never exposed to those theories, beliefs, and values? What direction do they go in and what is their experience once they begin teaching? If Grauer (1998) concludes exposing these beliefs could foretell the direction of art education (p. 352), I would argue the participants’ beliefs in my study should be heard as well. This is especially true precisely because there is a possibility they, along with all alternatively certified art teachers, will or have had great influence on the direction of art education with only minimal training.

Grauer’s (1998) study also focuses on how art teachers’ beliefs typically mirror how they were taught as art students. Stuhr (2003) adds to this point, iterating this is sometimes the case even after students graduate from traditional university programs (p. 307). Unfortunately, there is little research on how alternative certification art teachers approach their craft, especially considering they typically receive little or no content specific teacher training. I originally
speculated that the same problems persist for alternative certification teachers and are amplified due to the lack of exposure to art education training. As will be discussed in the Initial Findings section, my findings were inconclusive, as participants gave credit to some of their art teachers for their current beliefs about teaching, but not all.

Another area of art preservice training is addressed in Kowalchuk’s (1999) study of student teachers using reflective practices. In order to better understand their experiences, students reflected on their transitions from student to teacher and from abstract theory to practice by using journaling. Reflection in this case helps both students and researchers understand the perceptions of student teachers. These perceptions may dictate their success in teaching. The difference between Kowalchuk’s (1999) and my research is the absence of the student teaching component in alternative certification. Most alternative certification programs provide an internship phase, where the teacher is placed as professional, in charge of the classroom, and the burden of supporting and analyzing them is on the school and/or mentor support system in place (Brewer, 2006). Two of my participants had an additional two-week practicum where they taught under the supervision of an experienced art teacher. This however is still a significantly shorter period than traditional programs. This shortened (and in most cases non-existent) student-teaching period places alternatively certified teachers in a less reflective position and forces them to spend more time surviving their first years of teaching without analyzing their effectiveness or receiving the same support as traditionally trained students teachers.

In another aspect, Kowalchuk’s (1999) work is similar to Zientek’s (2007), concerning teacher confidence levels when receiving minimal training, specifically in alternative certification programs. Zientek (2007) compares the level of teacher preparedness in participants who have finished either an alternative or traditional certification programs. She refers to this
phenomenon as “teachers’ perceptions of preparedness” which is linked to self-efficacy (p. 975). Efficacy here refers to a teacher’s belief “in his or her own abilities to make a difference in the classroom” (Zientek, 2007, p. 968), or their belief in their ability to affect change. She used quantitative analysis of teacher surveys in Texas to illustrate that traditional baccalaureate-certified teachers are more prepared than non-traditionally trained teachers. Aspects of preservice and inservice teaching that influenced teacher efficacy included classroom management, instruction, mentoring experience, assessment of learning, and technology use.

Although, Zientek (2007) is not an art educator, her work illustrates why preservice training is valuable for teachers within their novice years of teaching. I agree, based on personal experiences and research that many alternatively certified teachers do not have the confidence, knowledge, and skills possessed by traditionally trained educators from university programs.

Novice Art Teachers

Beyond preservice training, studies concerning the experiences of novice art teachers are also pertinent to my research topic. Bain, Kuster, Milbrandt, and Newton (2010) focused on 11 art teachers recently graduated from traditional programs within their first year of teaching. Through the use of multiple interviews, they found the most challenging issues facing first-year art teachers surrounded time-management, student motivation, and classroom management. Despite these challenges, first-year teachers experienced the most success in areas relating to building a sense of community amongst their students, impacting students, improving dialogue on art, and showcasing student work. Most importantly, almost all participants in the study felt their first year was successful, although only six of them remained in the same position the following year.
The greatest commonality between my research and Bain et al. (2010) is in giving a voice to novice art teachers so that preservice programs can address such challenging issues. The two major differences, however, are the type of preservice programs teachers came from and my definition of novice teacher. Participants in my study had similar problems during their first year that were magnified in certain respects due to their minimal art education preservice training. Further, because my definition of novice teacher spans three years and my interviews did not take place during their novice years, the participants’ stories may be less accurate and instead reflect more on their overall experiences and meanings important to them in their current contexts. This is significant because not only was the purpose of my research to explicate their stories, it also aimed to discover how they felt about those experiences in the context of a much larger timeframe.

La Porte, Speirs, and Young (2008) also studied the experiences of beginner art teachers, but their survey population consisted of teachers within their first seven years, focusing on what influenced their curricular choices in the art classroom. All teachers came from traditional undergraduate art education programs, although the majority claimed they were influenced more by personal interest and student needs. This study addresses the concern of many academics within art education that many formally trained art teachers are not applying the postmodern curricular ideas presented to them in preservice education. While this concern turned out to be relatively true, La Porte et al. (2008) are optimistic about the influence of post-modern approaches to art education.

Once again, my research plans took this topic one step further and incorporated those who went through alternative certification. These teachers had less exposure to art education training, and the lens they view their teaching and curricular decisions through is more restrictive
as a result. Old approaches to art education are perpetuated within this group and new concepts, such as postmodern approaches are less likely to be uncovered. It is the lack of theoretical knowledge and subsequent reliance on older teaching approaches within art education that makes alternatively certified art teachers potentially dangerous to the profession.

Conclusions about Current Research

Throughout all the research literature there is a specific gap regarding alternative certification and art education. With art education articles, there is little or no mention of alternative certification and its influences on the education community, with the exception of Brewer (2006). On the other side, I could find little mention of art education or training within the vast literature on alternative certification over the last twenty years. I hope to close the gap in this area of education research, by illuminating the stories of those who became art educators through alternative certification. The next sections explain how my research paradigm and theoretical framework guided the analysis and interpretation of these stories.
Paradigmatic Assumptions

The particular worldview utilized to understand and guide this narrative inquiry is interpretivism. The interview process itself was conducted through an interpretivist lens and is explained in greater detail in the Methodologies section. The representation of the participants’ stories conveys the themes and meanings critical to our narratives.

Interpretivism

The interpretivist viewpoint, according to Heitz (2007), is the belief that people attach meaning to themselves and the world around them in order to understand reality (p. 3). This is not static or independent. Rather, it is based on the individual’s subjective beliefs and situation, the intersubjective beliefs of society, and/or the complex systems in which they exist. Humans interpret their experiences in many ways, including juxtaposing and/or aligning their experiences with societal norms. In the case of narrative inquiry, it is the stories of individuals that help them determine their identities. Their stories do not exist in a vacuum and an inter-play, or navigation, by the individual and audience takes place between their stories and the meta-narratives that dominate societal systems (Heitz, 2007, p. 4).

Interpretivism as a research paradigm sets itself against the tenets of positivism in terms of understanding the social world (Crofts, Hungria, Monfries, & Wood, 2011). There is no value-free perspective when studying people, only the subjective meanings attached to life experiences. Interpretivism is based on how people “actively interpret the situations in which they find themselves and act on the basis of these interpretations” (Crofts, Hungria, Monfries, & Wood, 2011, n.p.). These interpretations and resulting actions generate insight and understanding into the individual’s situation. The stories of participants in my study were not
objective and value free because they were a product of not only their interpretations, but also my interpretations as well.

The participants in my study shared their own stories within the parameters of the interview process. The stories themselves were an interpretation of life events based on the views and memories of the participants and served as data. The questions I asked directed and even subverted these interpretations, thus illustrating the intersubjective nature of storytelling (Heitz, 2007). While all our stories were similar in some ways and different in others, they were always juxtaposed against our conceptions of the “normal” teacher story, which in itself is a social construct used by many novice and not so novice educators to understand, measure, and plan their lived experience. My desire to conduct this study is evidence that I have personal preconceptions of what an art teacher’s roll should be in education. All the participants’ subjective beliefs were exposed and intertwined with my own, in the end adding rich diversity to the graphic narrative.
Theoretical Framework

According to Mitchell (2007), “interpretivists combine verbal accounts into useful knowledge, arranging and emphasizing facts so as to substantially improve the amount the audience knows and understands about the social phenomena being studied” (p. 7). In interpretivism, the creation of narratives is one technique for describing and analyzing complex events and stories. The structure and elements of the stories in this research were constructed using theories of narratology. Mieke Bal’s (2009) and Wolf Schmid’s (2010) works were utilized to inform this construction.

Narratology

According to Schmid (2010), narratology is the linking of fictional events in order to create a coherent story. Through these events, the reader is able to interpret the meaning of the story as a whole. It is the events of the participants’ and my stories, which constitute the whole narrative in this research.

Bal (2009) refers to three different aspects of the narrative: text, story, and fabula. The text serves as the linguistic signs by which the fabula is told. Linguistic text is not necessarily the only form of text. For instance, “in comic strips, another, non-linguistic, sign system is employed, namely the visual image” (Bal, 2009, p. 4). This is particularly useful in my case since the representation of the narratives will take the form of a graphic narrative.

Beyond text, the fabula is the chronology of events. The story is the manipulation of the fabula for narrative purposes—the reconstruction of events in order to create meaning. The primary fabula in my research is based on my personal experiences, with the participants’ fabulas embedded into this primary fabula. I embedded my participants’ fabulas within my own
not to make their stories subservient, but rather to elevate the entire story as a whole. According to Bal (2009) this type of construction can actually complexify the story and imbue it with different interpretations (p. 196). By combining, embellishing, and omitting certain aspects of the collective fabulas, I arranged all the events into a unified story.

In terms of integrating different fabulas in the form of a graphic narrative, it was important to choose when and why certain events could or should intermingle. Schmid (2010) refers to equivalences as the elements that are similar or contrasting, that link a story together outside of temporal linearity (p. 18). It is in this way that I linked the stories of the participants with my own. The general and emergent themes that manifest through the interview process and analysis served as these equivalences, creating continuity and emphasis for what we deem important. It should be noted that all participants’ stories did not interlock neatly with the graphic narrative as a whole and inclusion of such outlier stories were considered, typically within the autonomy of individual participant’s stories. Such exceptions to the unified storyline created richness to meaning and interpretive possibilities.

When I began this research I did not want to assume there would or would not be an abundance of equivalences. Assuming our stories would be very similar would deny the interdiscursive nature of representing such narratives. By including the narratives of others, Bal (2009) states: “it makes readers aware of the limited importance of the individual author and the impossibility of completely repressing ideological and social others. To realize that any text is a patchwork of different strata, bearing traces of different communities and of the contestations between them, is an essential insight” (p. 70). Even beyond the explicit stories told by participants, the characteristics of their identity (i.e., race, gender, belief systems, background, etc.) set them apart from each other, and from me. With that being said, the representation of
narratives was done from my point of view. My interpretation of events and stories contained a political and cultural perspective based on my identity (i.e. Caucasian, male, middle-class, etc.).

The best safeguard against the narrative being completely constructed from my own preferences was including participants in the editing stages of the process, such as member checks during the interview process, transcription, interpretive stage, and in the final narrative. Although their contributions were nominal, by giving participants access throughout the editing process, I ensured personally meaningful elements of each participant’s narratives were translated, as best as possible, into the final product. All these factors helped to contribute to the complexity and multiple interpretations derived from the graphic narrative.
Methodologies

Narrative inquiry focuses primarily on research into the stories of individuals and how they use these stories to navigate through and create meaning in their lives. The two main elements of this section include investigating the use of narratives in research, including examples from art education, and the use of comics as a viable form of storytelling. Along with the explanation of research studies, examples of actual narratives are included for contextual purposes.

Narrative Inquiry

As an example of art education using narrative inquiry, Rifa-Valls (2011) provides three stories of preservice art teachers and focuses on the visual aspects of those stories. The teachers used visual portfolios consisting of many different mediums in order to represent and reflect on their positions throughout their learning. The preservice teachers were able to reflect on their decisions and progress in their programs by creating their art and viewing it retroactively. “Learning comes to us both by telling and viewing stories as an audience” (Rifa-Valls, 2011, p. 295) and the use of visual narrative helped lend meaning and insight into the teachers’ experiences.

In the case of my research, the participants, excluding myself, did not explain their stories visually. All subjectivity in terms of visual representation fell on me as researcher as I decided what was included and excluded in the visual landscape of our stories. Yet, the visual, like discursive narrative, works metaphorically for the viewer or reader’s understanding. Imaging stories involved creating composite contexts, props, characters, and the like in order to relay
experience, emotion, and meaning as opposed to Rifa-Valls’ study, where each participant created their own visual representation of their experiences.

While Rifa-Valls (2011) researched the role of visual media in storytelling, McCoubrey (2000) illustrates how coalescing teachers’ stories can create interpretive possibilities. Her study considered art teachers stories and used individual narrative vignettes to represent three elementary teachers’ experiences. Although the settings for the three stories was a typical teaching day, the data used to re-present the stories was collected over five observations and seven interviews with the teacher participants. One reason for the fictionalized, consolidated versions was to create engagement with the reader, giving them a more personal look at the life of a teacher, without being overly descriptive. It was also meant to open interpretive possibilities for the audience, allowing them to generalize the teachers’ stories to their own experiences.

My role as researcher and constructor of the final narrative is very similar to McCoubrey’s (2000), except that I combined everyone’s stories into a whole narrative, and did not just consolidate the extended stories of individuals into smaller, more focused individual representations. While the audience will hopefully still be able to generalize the overall story to their own experiences, they will not, for the most part, be able to connect specific events and experiences with any one participant.

Outside of art education, Watson (2009) primarily focuses on the use of narrative to construct identity within individuals. She discusses the context of different forms of narratives and the purposes they serve. The master narrative, for example, contains accepted cultural norms and stereotypes that “delineate and confine local interpretation…in individual subjects as well as social institutions” (Watson, 2009, p. 469). Watson (2009) specifically focuses on the role of the counter-narrative, which involves the interplay and resistance of the status quo.
Within this interplay, individuals find tensions and defining moments that help construct their personal narratives. Watson’s (2009) participants were teachers who focused on the parts of their personal narratives that defined their role as developing educators. Roddy, the specific participant featured, considers his narrative to be counter to the typical teacher’s development, while in fact it is a story told by many teachers. The two educational discourses that exist within his story are “education as instrument of oppression and education as means for transformation” (Watson, 2009, p. 471).

To convey Roddy’s story, Watson’s (2009) narrative takes place through interview and transcription in the form of stanzas. Watson (2009) chose stanzas as a form of representing Roddy’s story to relay a level of complexity to the narrative (p. 472). By cutting out words and adding a poetry element to represent Roddy’s perceived identity formation, the text transcends everyday speech becoming more powerful to the audience. Transcending language into a more powerful meaning is a major thrust for my choice to use a graphic novel form for representing my findings. Adding visual elements can drastically change and/or enhance the meaning behind words and can add to the emotional, dramatic quality of the story for the reader (Chute, 2008; Eisner, 1996; McCloud, 1993).

Taylor and Littleon (2006) conducted research similar to Watson (2009) by using narrative discursive analysis to discover how recent art graduates form their identities as novices. Identity construction is influenced by pressures to adhere to social norms, past experiences, and the contexts of discourses about their identities (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p. 23). This form of analysis blends discourse analysis and life story analysis to situate the individual formed identity not as fixed, but rather dependent on the circumstances of their story and how they tell it.
Taylor and Littleton (2006) focus on participants new to their career field who are at a key moment in their identity development. Through the process of interviews, special attention is placed on the themes that connect participant stories. In particular, themes involving the tension between societal norms and resistance to such cultural standards pervaded the analysis, including aspects of race, gender, economic status, and family attitudes. These tensions are a part of both what the authors describe as the “canonical narratives” (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p. 34) and local resources (norms) that are important elements in the construction of identity.

Both Watson (2009) as well as Taylor and Littleton (2006) focus on the tension and resistance to culturally accepted narratives by individuals constructing their identity. This aspect of my research is important because teachers with little formal training already fall outside of the cultural norm and narratives of the trained professional. I saw my role of a novice teacher as being the underdog who approached education from an unorthodox vantage point. I believe other untrained novice teachers feel the same way and form their narratives in resistance to or against normative narratives of teaching. It should be noted, however, as the number of teachers participating in alternative certification programs continues to grow, these types of teachers stories will (if they haven’t already) become part of the cultural norm.

Graphic Novels

Representation and interpretation of data in the form of a graphic novel is a relatively new form for academic research. The medium of comics has been used for centuries as a means of storytelling (McCloud, 1993), but has been used sparingly within the education field as a viable form of representation for educational purposes. This has slowly changed over the last 30 to 40 years (Chute, 2008). Most recently, Carpenter and Tavin (2012) present the latest issue of
the Visual Arts Research journal, which published an entire issue not only presented in comics format, but addressing the use of comics in academic writing. They focus on how graphic novels and other unconventional modes of academic representation can be used to provide different meanings, interpretations, and insights compared to other, more traditional media and form such as written language alone. In addition to this recent work, Nick Sousanis is currently working on a dissertation concerning educational philosophy executed completely as a graphic narrative (Sousanis, 2012). It is the first dissertation of its kind to utilize this method and format.

Two more examples of graphic representations meant specifically for academic purposes include the work of Carpenter and Tavin’s (2010) and Duffy (2009). The first example uses the combination of text and pre-existing imagery to complexify the reconceptualization of art education in a historical, current, and future context (Carpenter & Tavin, 2010). While the alignment/juxtaposition of text and imagery add clarity to the discussion between the two main characters, they also create a different interpretation of meaning than if it contained language-based text alone. Duffy’s (2009) work is a graphic representation, describing a museum exhibit on comics and graphic formatting. He illustrates how sequential art can tell stories and represent time in complex ways. The exhibit is meant to create a sense of narrative through the arrangement of panels, gutters, images, and overall layout of the art. Both works present visual storytelling in order to create meaning for their art education audience.

Beyond the story-telling strategies of Ayers and Alexander-Tanner (2010), their book, To Teach, also serves as inspiration for the visual style and format I used for this research study. Simple design and visual metaphors are abundant in their stories and help the audience clearly understand the main points. Metaphors can also be used to aid interpretive possibilities by creating multiple meanings for events, ideas, and many other components of a story. In this
medium both text and art complement and enhance each other in conveying meaning, while neither is subordinate to the other. Gordon (2010) briefly discusses the motivation behind using imagery in combination with words. If the point is only to create an image that could be explained using words, the use of a graphic format is superficial. However, if the imagery is included to enhance the text or if it is an integral part of story-telling to convey emotion, satire, or meaning, then it is appropriate (Gordon, 2010, p. 186). I agree, but would add the inclusion of imagery can also change the meaning of a textual story. I would also argue that the inverse is true, that imagery can be used without text to tell a story (and that adding text can create different-supplemental meanings).

McCloud’s (1993) work, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, uses the same simple format as Ayers and Alexander-Tanner (2010) in terms of text and imagery and is presented as an explanation of the various reasons why comics are a viable and effective form of communication. McCloud (1993) describes the simplification of words and images to convey a story and how the connection of the two is dependent on clarity, message, and the audience. In no other media is the reader asked to do as much in terms of connecting symbols, words, and images while interpreting meaning from their arrangement (McCloud, 1993, pp. 152-61). The use of McCloud’s principles is evident in the final graphic work produced in this research. Most decisions concerning the combination of text and imagery, visual metaphors, the arrangement and pace of the story, and other creative elements were made based on the interpretation of the participants’ stories in conjunction with my own. These decisions were also largely based on my own ability to represent the narratives in text and image, as well as my aesthetic preferences.

The visual style of the overall graphic narrative is similar to a primitive example of mine,
completed three years ago, with some adjustments based on the nature of the stories, research, and logistical issues (discussed in Representation of Findings).

Simplification of elements is one aspect I utilized in my research and graphic novel work. As McCloud (1993) mentions, “By stripping down an image to its essential ‘meaning’, an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can’t” (p. 30). In other words, by using simplified text and imagery, readers can focus on the message or idea being conveyed and not on the character, setting, or event depicted. This point could also be made for strictly linguistic texts, where overt realism in description can actually subvert the importance and/or meaning of a story (Bal, 2009). For the artist/author, reducing forms down to their essence can also create more empathy between the characters of the story and the readers. By abstracting the main characters, the reader can identify with them more easily and will again focus on interpreting the characters’ experiences instead of the superficialities of the story (McCloud, 1993, pp. 32-7). This can be seen in my graphic narrative, where the cartoon nature of characters makes them more abstract and applicable to the audience’s sensibilities.

Closure is another large aspect of comics that leaves the story open for interpretation while forcing the readers to use their imaginations. Closure is literally the cognitive process of receiving only part(s) of information while perceiving the whole (McCloud, 1993, pp. 60-9). While it can be simple or complex, closure in comics relies on the ability to fill in gaps, through either text or imagery. The story in comics is constructed panel by panel and using closure to exclude visual or textual elements can convey more meaning than including those elements. This concept is similar to an ellipsis in literary narratives, where a portion of the fabula is omitted for interpretive purposes (Bal, 2009, p. 101). The result is the audience perceiving all of what is happening in an event or timeframe while only parts are explicitly shown and/or written.
Because I approached this research project from an interpretivist viewpoint, I included explicit and implicit elements of closure to help the audience interpret and draw meaning from the narratives.
Procedures

This research project utilized qualitative data collection and analysis in order to create a picture of what beginning teachers without adequate training go through when they start teaching art. In the initial stages of research, I defined the types of participants and then used procedures based on interpretivist ideas and narrative inquiry to record, analyze, and re-present the stories of these teachers.

Participants

The study focused on teachers recalling their first to third years of teaching with an emphasis on their beginning experiences and struggles. It is within this timeframe when many alternative teachers make the decision to either stay in teaching or move on to other career choices (Darling-Hammond, 2000). The three-year timeframe also represents the genesis of teacher identity construction, which affects the type of teacher someone becomes well beyond his or her beginnings. The concept of the first year teacher as novice has a great deal to do with the perception of the individual, who might consider him or herself as a true beginner long after the first year. The limitation here is that some teachers may consider themselves in this category even after their third year. I argue though that those who place themselves in that category after their third year should reflect on their career choices.

While I use a three-year period to define “novice teaching,” participants in the study possessed years of experience in education beyond that timeframe. All three participants had five to seven years of teaching experience. The stories they told were a construction of their memories, with their recollection of past experiences adding richness to the context and meanings behind their narratives.
Another important aspect of my research is the temporally- and culturally-situated nature of my participants’ current situation (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). All three art teachers were Caucasian, female, and had achieved a certain level of success over their years of teaching. In addition, they all worked full-time at similar high schools within the same large, suburban district. They had each made it past the three year mark mentioned by Darling-Hammond (2000), yet each had very different views of their current roles and futures in art education (discussed more in the Initial Findings section). In addition, the interviews took place at the end of the school year, when student behavior issues tend to increase, exhaustion from the year sets in, and the summer seems just around the corner. The participants’ moods were certainly affected by this fact, although differently for each.

It should be noted that two of the participants went through the same alternative certification program at the same time. They were also both hired at the same high school and work together to this day. When I first realized their connection, I worried about the anonymity of participant interviews. I was concerned they would be uncomfortable knowing about each other’s involvement and that this connection would represent a breach of their confidentiality. When they realized they were both participants in my research, they were comfortable with the situation and even reference each other at points in their interviews. They had no issue with keeping each other’s stories or identities hidden from each other and embraced talking with each other about their past experiences.

Although the connection did not ultimately undermine the research, I was also concerned about the participants’ connection because I assumed their experiences and stories would be too similar. Diversity of perspectives is a desired aspect of qualitative research. Luckily, while their backgrounds and paths are quite similar, their recollection of events and perceptions of their
experiences were very different. As a result, their stories and dispositions added richer multiplicity to the eventual graphic narrative.

The current situation and experiences of the participants also presented an ethical issue in terms of the potential psychological effects of sharing their stories. For all of the participants, the stories they told contained, to a certain degree, information that could be characterized as negative, embarrassing, and even traumatizing. Although this concern was addressed in the IRB-approved letter of consent, I was also aware of this potential vulnerability during the interview process and tackled it with sensitivity to the best of my abilities. A major purpose of the interviews was to discover the difficult experiences of people at a very precarious moment in their identity construction. As a researcher who has and is experiencing many of the same problems of novice teachers, I was able to guide interviews not to avoid such issues, but to uncover them for anonymous graphic and narrative rendering in an appropriate fashion. This issue was also dealt with by letting participants know they had some editorial control over the final work.

Procedures for Narrative Inquiry

Heitz (2007) describes the steps in narrative inquiry as investigation in order to collect and convey participant stories and ensure an interpretivist analysis. These steps are prioritized and elaborated on in the following sections for the interview, analysis, and interpretation processes, as well as aiding in the description of my role as researcher.
Interviews.

The first step in narrative inquiry is to contextualize the stories from participants by understanding their subjectivity (Heitz, 2007, p. 5). Studying the phenomenon first-hand by recording not only the stories but also the background of those stories is important. Within my research, I used the interview method to collect these stories. Despite criticisms that interview data is not naturally occurring and the resulting data is often guided by the interviewer, Taylor and Littleton (2006) argue interviews are natural and culturally accepted forms of communicating. An interview can help focus data collection around specific topics and, in some cases, is preferable because it gives participants a forum for first person narration of meaningful events (Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p. 28). Through this qualitative method (Taylor & Littleon, 2006; Watson, 2009), participants can share their personal backgrounds, preservice experiences in alternative certification, first-hand experiences in the field, and stories related to training or teaching they find meaningful or important.

The interviews themselves were open-ended and semi-structured. Cohen Evron (2001) utilized this method to interview art teachers about their beliefs and identity construction. Informal, semi-structured interviews were most appropriate for my research because I approached participants as individuals and not simply as the object of research (Cohen Evron, 2001, p. 132). Each interview lasted about an hour and each participant was interviewed twice. This time frame allowed me to ask all necessary questions but also gave adequate time for us to stray from the pre-prescribed list of interview questions. As a result, questions deviated from teaching practice and explored participants beliefs, feelings, and experiences in their personal, non-working lives. This personal perspective aided in creating richer descriptions and interpretations of participants’ stories by presenting a broader context of their lives along with
creating a more relaxed atmosphere during the interviews. As an invitation to this atmosphere and in the spirit of reciprocity, I also related to participants’ experiences and interwove my stories with theirs during the interview. By sharing my vulnerability, the participants’ comfort during the research processes was enhanced, allowing them to subvert some questions in order to relate more personally meaningful information.

The list of interview questions was sent to participants in advance of the actual interview so they could formulate relevant thoughts and stories. This not only ensured some fluidity in the interview process, but was also meant to help participants feel more comfortable before and during the interview. Interviews were conducted in person, recorded, and later transcribed. While I do not want to focus on objectivity as the point of interview transcription, I did want to record them accurately so I could better recall their stories for the reinterpretation/representation phase. Along with being transcribed and re-narrated within a graphic narrative, I also included a brief summary of their narratives in the Initial Findings section to provide context for the analysis. This information was also used to add subtlety to characters and stories as they were re-presented. For convenience, interviews were conducted at coffee shops located near the participants’ schools and most interviews were completed during work hours, with the exception of one conducted on the weekend. Distractions were minimal although noted at times within the interview transcriptions.

*Interview questions.*

The list of interview questions is broken down into three categories based on general themes within the research: historical context, classroom experience, and support structures. Under the historical context category, questions were related to the overall experiences of
participants as art students (K-12) along with their motivations to become art teachers. Questions in this category also probed their experiences in their alternative certification program, why they chose the program (versus traditional routes), and how the program was structured.

Next, questions about the participants’ classroom experiences were related specifically to their stories as novice teachers in the art room. These questions were geared toward their overall experience in their first year(s) along with what they found effective in the classroom. I wanted to know if the techniques they learned in alternative certification were helpful to them or if they had to adapt techniques on their own. These questions also focused on how the participants adjusted to the reality of teaching versus their initial preconceived notions. This meant understanding what they thought teaching would be like and how that changed once they started.

The last category addressed support structures and is meant to help me understand what elements in the participants’ teaching experiences were the most valuable in supporting their development as art educators. I wanted to know what was most influential in developing how they taught, such as alternative certification, previous experience, professional development, colleagues, or outside resources. The category also looks at who was most supportive during their preservice and in-service teaching experiences, such as family, administrators, mentors, colleagues, or professors. Finally, I wanted to know what supportive or instructive elements they did not receive that they believe would have been helpful during these experiences.

Beyond the structure of the interview questions, the two most important aspects of participants’ stories is the meaning they derived from their experiences as preservice/in-service teachers and my role as co-constructor of their stories. As a result of the questions being open-ended, the participants and I deviated from the initial list at certain points because the detour was important to the story. I wanted to know if teachers had found alternative certification valuable,
especially because of my bad experience. Once they graduated what were the elements or events that pervaded their experiences as novice teachers? Did they have any regrets and/or positive experiences in regards to the route they chose or their first years in teaching? What helped them get through the tough times, or were they able to get through them? Special attention was given to the subjective and changing nature of questions based on the responses of individuals.

As the researcher I realized I could not ignore my role as co-constructor of the participants’ narrative, which included my own narrative (Heitz, 2007, p. 6). While the summary of my story in the Introduction could provide some knowledge about me, the larger context of my subjective experiences, presumptions, interpretations, and priorities were the most pervasive influences on this research. Recognizing my influence on the meaning and interpretation of these stories was embraced and noted. For that purpose, I constantly referenced my positions on the substantive parts of the research, from the interviews through the representation and narration.

Analysis.

After the interview process, the next step in my research involved investigating, reacquainting myself with, and understanding the meta-narratives participants were using and/or resisting in their stories (Heitz, 2007). While some aspects of teacher meta-narrative is covered in the Literature Review and the section on Narrative Inquiry, during the analysis process I wanted to find a more appropriate, culturally-situated meta-narrative that would encapsulate the position(s) of alternatively certified teachers. McNabb (2004) defined two distinct teacher meta-narratives while studying the portrayal of teachers in popular media since the publication of A Nation at Risk (1983). Coincidentally, it was this publication which originally stirred much of
the debate on and eventually led to the introduction of alternative certification. The two meta-narratives are: the teacher as idealist and the teacher as dysfunctional.

The teacher as idealist is a combination of three meta-narratives that have been a part of America society for centuries: the teacher as professional, the teacher as called, and teaching as an occupation (McNabb, 2004). For the purposes of this research, the first two meta-narratives are utilized. The teacher as professional narrative defines a teacher as someone who is highly trained with expert knowledge who is allowed to apply their knowledge at their own discretion (McNabb, 2004, pp. 28-9). The second, teacher as called narrative suggests that people choose to teach for religious or spiritual reasons, believing in the intrinsic value of their contributions (McNabb, 2004, p. 30). I believe alternative certification teachers align with and resist these first two historically and culturally defined meta-narratives. From McNabb’s (2004) description, the third meta-narrative, that of teaching as an occupation, falls more into the area of school governance rather than individual teacher identity, and is therefore excluded from this analysis.

The teacher as dysfunctional is worth defining as an antithesis to the aforementioned meta-narratives used in this research (McNabb, 2004). This meta-narrative in many ways represents the position of the teacher who was not trained in the traditional sense and was not necessarily called to the profession. It is however too broad a category to be used effectively within the analysis of interviews because it defines all that a teacher is not.

Throughout the analysis process within my research, the two meta-narratives of teacher as called and teacher as professional were used to identify and understand the position(s) of participants within their preservice and novice years of teaching. How the participants’ stories aligned with and resisted these meta-narratives is discussed in the initial findings section.
The analysis of the transcribed interviews was done using text analysis (Cohen-Everon, 2001). This method was used to first compare the narratives with meta-narratives and then to categorize general themes and explicate emergent themes. General themes were based on interview questions and the direct answers given by participants to those questions. Emergent themes were included because they “were not imposed prior to data-collection” (Cohen-Everon, 2001, p. 136) and allow for the inclusion of what participants found meaningful. Emergent themes were also incorporated by looking for and including data that contradicted my initial assumptions and beliefs about alternative certification and novice art teachers.

In the first phase of analysis, I looked at each participant separately and labeled transcripts with comments based on interview questions, emergent categories, and teaching meta-narratives. These comments were used to create brief summaries of each participant’s narrative that were utilized in the eventual cross-analysis of participants’ stories and for quick reference during the reinterpretation process. This portion of the analysis followed each participant’s stories chronologically and my impressions were noted. During the second phase, each thematic category, general and emergent, were cross-analyzed to see how participants’ experiences were alike and different (Cohen-Everon, 2001, p. 138). In addition to comparing and contrasting experiences, special attention was paid to what participants emphasized as meaningful in those experiences.

Interpretation.

The last step was to evaluate all data while being cognizant that it was part of the participants’ narratives and the subjective meaning that it conveyed (Heitz, 2007, p. 7). During this stage, I began formulating the compiled storyline based on the general and emergent themes.
This process involved the coalescing of all participants’ narratives according to logistical and personal preferences. I included, excluded, and organized all the information that applied to stories of novice art teachers. The narrative that resulted from the qualitative findings is a fictionalized construction of my perceptions as a researcher and teacher, based largely on my personal preferences as a filter.

In addition to creating interpretive possibilities, fictionalization was used to protect the identities of participants. As an example, Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, and Orr (2010) brought up an ethical issue concerning the identities of participants in a narrative inquiry study. Participants, while working collaboratively on “interim field-texts” (Clandinin et al., 2010, p. 85) with researchers, became aware and nervous about their public visibility when the work was published. This was resolved by fictionalizing texts and combining related inquiries so no participant’s story could be isolated. Anonymity was also maintained in McCoubrey’s (2000) research wherein stories and observations were collected over several days, but the final product was coalesced and fictionalized to ensure anonymity. Although this was not originally my intention in combining stories when creating the graphic narrative, it better allowed me to keep participants’ identities confidential beyond the changing of the participants’ names.

Multi-Vocality in Narrative

While combining stories to ensure anonymity, I followed Guba and Lincoln’s (2005) constructivist criteria of fairness to ensure a certain level of validity. Their notion of fairness focuses on multi-vocality—making sure participants’ voices are heard, analyzed, and utilized fairly in the research process to prevent their marginalization (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 207). Heitz (2007) reiterates this point in stating, “The goal is not to ‘minimize bias’... but rather to let
the subject speak in her own voice to the greatest extent possible” (p. 9). Following these guidelines and making sure my participants’ voices are heard, both in the interview process and, to a lesser extent, in the interpretation/analysis, ensured rich descriptions and interpretations of events.

Multi-vocality within my research also implies the final narrative does not belong to any individual, but was influenced by multiple perspectives. This influence was not problematic in my mind, and the participants understood early on that the concept of fictionalizing their stories and including imagery negated ownership of individual stories to an extent. Care was taken to include participants in the process of constructing and imaging the final narrative.
INITIAL FINDINGS

Representation is in the form of an initial synopsis and analysis of narratives followed by a graphic narrative representing the compilation of our stories. The initial report is supplemental to the overall representation of narratives and addresses the analysis of participants’ stories in terms of transcripts, relevant data, and an explanation of the interview process. In a general sense, this section is used to help inform the graphic narrative.

This report of findings represents my initial interpretation of the research interviews and addresses the analysis of their stories. The report is broken down into four sections. The first three sections are set aside for a brief interpretation of the three individual participant’s narratives, which generally follow a chronological framework. The three unedited transcripts combine for over 200 pages of text chronicling the stories and experiences of the participants. These summative interpretations are included to give context to the analysis and to convey, in large part, what I found meaningful from participants’ interviews. After the interpretation, each participant narrative is individually analyzed through the lens of the meta-narratives mentioned in the analysis: teacher as called and teacher as professional. The fourth section is dedicated to the cross-analysis of participant narratives as is explained further below.

Participant 1 – “Brittany”

Participant 1, whom I refer to as “Brittany,” was the first art teacher recruited as a participant and interviewed for her narrative on alternative certification and novice teaching. She is in her seventh year of teaching high school art and was trained through a university-based alternative certification program.
Brittany’s narrative.

Brittany had very little training in or experience with art as a student from grade school through college. The experience she did have was typically marked by insecurities concerning her lack of skills and knowledge in the visual arts. Her major in college was interior design and she only had to take two studio art classes. After graduation, she had trouble finding a job in her degree field. Out of necessity, she resorted to teaching middle and high school art for one year on an emergency certification at a small rural school. When her emergency certification expired, she entered an alternative certification program.

Brittany’s program was a year and a half long with night classes twice a week. Although the program coursework was at a graduate level, Brittany was frustrated at the redundancy of the content and the naivety of other participants who were older with no teaching experience. She had already been teaching for a year and coursework on subjects such as teaching theory and elementary education seemed like a waste of time. Also, she was the only art teacher in the program and there was no art-specific content covered. Despite all this, Brittany’s overall impression of the program was good. She especially liked one of her professors who covered topics like classroom management, levels of thinking, and Special Education (SPED) policy and procedures.

The first year of teaching, which came before joining her Alternative Certification program, was terrifying and exhausting for Brittany. Her classroom style was characterized by tight-fisted control and inflexibility. She feared confrontation and had little idea of what or how to teach. She found support from other teachers and coaches, but felt isolated because not only was she the only art teacher, but because the administration of the school rarely gave feedback
on how she was performing. The second year, which coincided with her acceptance into the A.C. program, she felt that her teaching improved but she still did not enjoy it. She had support from her A.C. program assigned mentor, but the woman had trouble helping Brittany with high school art because she was a retired elementary school teacher.

It was around this time, however, that Brittany found art-specific professional development to be especially helpful, even more so than her A.C. program. This was due partly because of the empathetic, collegial environment of these trainings and because she was able to learn specific lessons and strategies she could implement back in the classroom. As a result of this and experience over time, Brittany became more comfortable teaching art.

After her third year, she and her husband moved and her intention was to go back to graduate school and get a job in interior design. When that did not work out, she found a job teaching art at a suburban high school where she is today. At this point, she is now trying to minimize her role at her current school and leave teaching within the next few years to get back into her degree field.

Analysis.

Upon reading the transcripts of Brittany’s interview, it is evident that the meta-narrative she completely resists in her story is that of the teacher as called. The opposite of someone being called to a profession would be someone who is basically forced to work a job out of necessity. Brittany makes it clear very early on in the interview process that she had no intention of teaching: “I cannot handle kids, like I’ve never been a kid person… I do not like drama, and I don’t like to be a part of it, and I don’t like to be around it. I don’t have patience with it and… I associate high school kids with drama.” It was out of the necessity for money and a job that she
went into teaching, and she has since tried tirelessly to get out of the profession. Even now, after six years and a good amount of experiential expertise, she feels teaching is not what she should be doing. At one point during the interview she emphasizes this point, saying, “I’ve spent six years doing something I never intended to do, that I do not like, you know, and I’m tired of it. I need to do something else.” This represented a significant negative undertone for the discussions about her alternative certification and her first years of teaching.

The other meta-narrative Brittany resists is that of the teacher as a professional. This is first evident in her background where she received little training in the visual arts. As a result, she lacked confidence in her ability to teach within that subject, something that was not remedied by her alternative certification program. Resistance to this narrative is also evident specifically within her first few years of teaching where she felt completely lost and exhausted. Her need to control situations within the classroom and be perceived as an expert by everyone illustrates many of the insecurities that plagued her early on.

In addition, she does not feel extensive training is as helpful as classroom experience which is contrary to the idea of a professional laid out be McNabb (2004). In Brittany’s opinion, improvement in teaching is not necessarily a product of learning theory or extensive training but rather it is more a product of practical experience, which comes naturally over time. Based on her responses, good teaching also seems more tied to procedural efficiency and classroom management rather than flexibility and creativity in teaching methods.

She does however come into alignment with the professional meta-narrative at times. One example is when she emphasizes the importance of her professional development with the statewide art organization. Learning from the expertise of experienced art teachers and being in an environment of collegiality was very helpful. In addition, she has, over time, begun to view
herself more as an expert, as someone who is knowledgeable in art education and applies that knowledge in her teaching.

Participant 2 – “Morgan”

After Brittany, the next participant, who I call “Morgan,” was the second art teacher recruited and interviewed. She has taught high school art for over five years and was alternatively certified through a regional service center program.

Morgan’s narrative.

Morgan had quite a bit of visual art experience in grade-school, later in college, and within her community growing up. Most of her experiences were positive and include having a high school art teacher who is still her best friend and being invited to do university-level ceramics while a student in high school. In college, Morgan originally wanted to major in elementary education. Due to the poor quality of the program, Morgan switched to graphic design and took a multitude of studio art and design courses. She also worked as a graphic designer.

After graduating, Morgan and her husband moved to central Texas where she worked several jobs outside of her degree field, including one for a pharmaceutical company. She was paid well, but felt the company was morally bankrupt and was unsatisfied with her role there. She wanted to do something more fulfilling and she had always wanted to try teaching.

Morgan chose alternative certification because she had no interest in going back to school full-time and wanted to enter the profession quickly. Morgan’s first impression was that the program was very cookie-cutter, with the teacher showing prescribed slideshows on mandatory
content such as email etiquette and simple technology lessons. Beyond that however, there were classes on classroom management, student learning behaviors, and quite a bit of collaborative time to work with other participants. The program focused on some theories of teaching, but for the most part was about practical classroom applications of techniques and procedures. While the program had no art-specific content, the instructor did bring in art teachers to talk about their experiences with her and the other art teacher participants. Her overall impression of the program was very good and she felt it prepared her well for teaching.

After the coursework portion of the program, she did a two week practicum with an older art teacher in the region. Her experience was awful. The art teacher she worked with hated A.C. teachers and did not recommend Morgan for certification. The program supported Morgan, however, and she was certified and found a job soon after.

Morgan’s first year was hard, but she only taught an art introduction course and her students were mostly affluent, two factors which helped make things easier. She also had a mentor on campus that was extremely helpful. Morgan’s approach to teaching was largely based on creating relationships with students and then working with them to create projects and options that interested them. She experienced more success with students over the next two years and took on more classes as well. Morgan is still at the same school where she started and at this point can see herself teaching art for the next 10-15 years.

Analysis.

Throughout Morgan’s interview, she is dominantly aligned with the meta-narrative of the teacher as called. Her best friend was a high school art teacher, her mom was a teacher, and Morgan herself decided to study elementary education in college, before discovering the poor quality of the program. She mentions that teaching was something she’s always been interested
in and the language she uses for most of the interview is strong enough to evoke the feeling that she is called to teach.

The strongest evidence of being called to teaching comes in her conversation about leaving the pharmaceutical company. She mentions working for a pharmacy representative was like, “working for the Anti-Christ” and that teaching and helping people is much more rewarding. Morgan’s comment almost implies the spiritual or religious quality of the meta-narrative defined by McNabb (2004). Morgan also expresses the intrinsic rewards of teaching and the idea of needing passion to be successful, both of which follow with this idea of being destined for the vocation.

She does, however, resist this meta-narrative at times in her somewhat dilettante tendencies, both within the arts and her earlier occupations. She mentions working with a world-renowned ceramicist in her porcelain program, but loses interest soon after. She also implies those tendencies in regards to her graphic design degree, which she did not really care to pursue after graduating. The last hint of resistance to the meta-narrative of teacher as called is at the end of the interview when she refers to teaching with the following: “I really love it, I really…I um, I see myself every year, about every year getting a little bit farther away….” The last part, “little bit farther away” refers to her inclination to move on from the teaching profession.

The other meta-narrative, teacher as professional, is also strongly aligned with Morgan’s story. She first emphasizes her extensive training in almost all of the visual arts, including her university-level porcelain work and jobs doing graphic design during college. She mentions the rigorous coursework and content of her alternative certification program (beyond the initial cookie-cutter remarks) and includes how the resources given to her by the program helped her during her first year. Her alignment with the idea of the teacher as a professional is also seen in
her continuous professional development. She specifically mentions that she is constantly “trying to keep really current, especially with the photo,” regarding the latest trends in the visual arts.

Morgan does, however, resist this meta-narrative by sharing her perceptions of and insecurities with being alternatively certified:

I felt, I felt only inferior to teachers who had done a four year bachelor’s degree and still to this day, I still feel inferior. I feel that a lot of teachers don’t like alternative certification and it has a really bad rap and when I even tell people I’m like… I kind of, like, try not to tell people, you know what I mean.

This sentiment is repeated several times throughout the interview, but is usually followed by a statement of how successful she has been as a result of her training.

Participant 3 – “Tammy”

After Morgan, the next participant, who I refer to as “Tammy,” was the third and final art teacher recruited and interviewed. She has taught high school art for over five years and was trained through a regional service center alternative certification program. Coincidentally, she went through the program at the same time as Morgan and they both received art teaching positions at the same school soon after finishing their certification program. Although Morgan may be referenced in this section, the major similarities and differences between their stories are explicitly addressed in the Cross-Analysis section.
Tammy’s narrative.

Growing up Tammy was exposed to the visual arts early on and had many art experiences through college. Art was supported in her family and she took several classes outside of school. During high school, she even had a job painting billboards for a small business. She had several bad experiences with her middle and high school art teachers who were either too structured or too controlling in how they taught.

When Tammy got to junior college, she had a professor who she models much of her current teaching after. When she transferred to a four-year university, she received a double major degree in fine arts and graphic design. She originally wanted to go into advertising or marketing and took a multitude of design and studio classes. After graduation, she moved with her husband to East Texas where she got a job at a photography studio. Following a second move, she gave birth to twins, held several different retail jobs, gave birth to a daughter, and was a stay at home mom, all within a seven year span.

Once her children were old enough, she took a job as art teacher’s aide at her sons’ school. Tammy loved teaching so much she applied for alternative certification. She chose the program for convenience, both for location and the time-frame of the coursework.

Tammy’s experience in A.C. is delineated by the two professors in charge during the coursework. The first teacher, according to Tammy, taught how to approach teaching regardless of subject-matter and was effective. The coursework was rigorous and the professor gave valuable advice on lesson-planning, classroom management, and flexibility in teaching. However, this professor had disputes with the program’s management and quit halfway through the program. The second teacher was a novice teacher-trainer and emphasized core subjects only. At one point, Tammy walked out because she was told by the professor that as an electives
teacher, she had nothing to offer in a discussion. While her overall impression of the program was good, she does not recommend it for aspiring teachers.

Tammy went through her practicum, graduated from the program, and was hired at the same school as Morgan. Her first year was exhausting but she immediately connected with her students. The job became a struggle, however, because she and her on-campus mentor did not get along. This conflict combined with adjusting back to full-time work became so extreme she almost quit after two months. While the conflict with her mentor was never truly resolved, Tammy continued through the first year and the situation improved over time.

Tammy’s style of teaching from day one revolved around treating students like adults and giving open-ended assignments. She typically gives students more than one option for projects and freedom to execute them in their own way. She says it is similar to the way she wished she had been taught. While Tammy enjoys teaching and has achieved a certain level of success, she does not think she will stick with it for more than five or six more years, once her children are out of school. It is in her nature to try new things and is interested in massage therapy as her next job.

Analysis.

First, Tammy’s narrative tends to resist the meta-narrative of the teacher as called. She explains from a very early age that art was approached from a practical standpoint by her family. She has an overall pragmatic attitude about her life and career that precludes the possibility of being called to teach. In fact, as she mentions during the college portion of her interview, “retail management [is] very easy, very easy for me,” implying her natural talents are in areas outside of education. The argument could be made, however, that salesmanship and management are
important aspects of teaching. Another point of resistance to this meta-narrative is explicitly stated when she says she can only do a job until she gets bored with it: “So usually it’s about five years and I’m like, ‘Oh okay I’m done with this.’” The fact that she is continuing on in teaching until her children graduate proves she is working more out of necessity and not for the intrinsic values associated with teaching.

Tammy’s story does, however, align with the idea of the teacher as professional. This is illustrated in the description of her alternative certification program, at least the portion taught by her first professor. She contends the coursework and materials were extensive and rigorous, guiding participants through all aspects of teaching theories, classroom approaches, and even procedure. Tammy talks extensively on how collaborative teams were constantly set up across grade-levels and content areas to provide each participant with as many perspectives on the content being studied. While I would argue it is difficult to assess the extensiveness of the program’s coursework without being able to relate it to other programs, in the end, Tammy did feel fully prepared and confident she could teach with the tools she had acquired through her certification program. She describes how once she was in the classroom, she implemented the information and knowledge learned in her A.C. program and she was successful.

Cross-Analysis of Participants’ Narratives

The cross-analysis of the three participants’ stories was executed by collecting general themes based on interview questions, and emergent themes, constructed on divergent participant answers. Once collected, the findings were organized into a table, which was used to come to general conclusions about the relationships between participants’ stories. These conclusions were used to inform the second part of this research project: the graphic narrative.
This section is divided up into several subsections based on the relationships of each participant and their stories. Because of their similar paths to and experiences in teaching, the relationship between Morgan’s and Tammy’s narratives are examined first. In the second subsection, Brittany’s narrative is compared and contrasted against the narratives of Morgan and Tammy.

Morgan and Tammy.

Throughout the analysis of their interviews, there were many pervasive similarities between these two participants. Morgan and Tammy both grew up with extensive visual art backgrounds, pursued the same degrees in college, eventually joined the same alternative certification program, and were hired at the same high school.

As a result having similar education backgrounds, receiving the same teacher training, and having similar students, Morgan and Tammy approach their teaching in many of the same ways. Both of their teaching styles reflect student-oriented learning by giving students freedom and choices when it comes to executing artworks. They teach similarly to the way they were taught, by giving students prompts and problems that encourage students to come up with visual solutions. They also credit creating relationships with students as one of their biggest strengths, which has contributed to their success as teachers.

Despite the many similarities in life events and teaching styles, there are many differences between Tammy and Morgan based largely around their perceptions of experience. A major theme throughout Morgan’s narrative is how the support of others and external factors have contributed to her success. She mentions how great her high school and college professors were and how they have influenced her teaching in a positive way. She also relays the positive
experiences she had in alternative certification and with her mentor during her first year. When asked about struggles during the first year, she simply refers to how blessed she was to have only one class and how it was her dream job.

Tammy’s narrative on the other hand eludes more to a disposition that is self-driven and highly-motivated, with success coming as the result of internal factors. Despite giving credit to her college professors for influencing her, Tammy’s stories are more about how she did things her own way and did not allow external forces to prevent her from improving. She emphasizes the extensive rigor of the alternative certification program and her adversarial relationship with her mentor during her first years. With the exception of crediting a handful of individuals (such as her mother, husband, and the good A.C. teacher), Tammy’s success in teaching and beyond is a product of her own hard work and ingenuity.

Not only do the differences between these two participants signify their individual personalities, it also affected how they recollected their experiences and illustrated what they found meaningful. As a result of Morgan’s overall attitude towards her experiences, there were some events she omitted or changed. One example from the first interview is when she neglected to mention the dichotomy in her alternative certification program between the good professor and the bad one. During the second interview, she mentioned she had talked with Tammy and recalled the events, but that it did not stand out in her mind as anything significant. For Tammy, however, the switching of teachers in the middle of the program and the resulting events were extremely traumatic.

There were also discrepancies across their two narratives, specifically in the logistics of the alternative certification program. Morgan claimed the program to be one year in length, with summer observations, two semesters of coursework, and a two-week practicum. Tammy’s
sequencing was the same but she added an extra semester of coursework before the summer observation. She also claimed classes were twice a week, while Morgan mentioned three to four nights a month. At first I simply though this to be an oversight or it could also be an effort by Tammy to emphasize the extensive and rigorous nature of the program. After investigating the program online however, I discovered that it was in fact 17 months in total timeframe (Region XIII Education Service Center website, 2008).

Brittany’s narrative.

While Morgan’s and Tammy’s narratives are very different when examined on a one-on-one basis, they are extraordinarily similar relative to Brittany’s narrative. One large difference evident in the narratives is between Brittany’s background in the visual arts versus the two other participants. Brittany had very little exposure to the visual arts growing up and as a result had little confidence in her abilities in art classes and later in teaching. Her undergrad degree, while tied to art, was not picked for that reason and she struggled with the few art courses she had to take. As a result, she is cognizant that she empathizes with art students at lower skill-levels and it is evident in her approach to teaching.

Another noticeable difference is with Brittany’s motivation for teaching versus the other two participants. The others worked several jobs in the years after graduation and eventually made a willing decision to teach. Brittany on the other hand was never interested in teaching and was reluctant throughout, not just the hiring process, but her entire teaching career. She went through alternative certification to keep her job, not to gain one. This story echoes Brewer’s (2006) concern about recent graduates “looking for stop-gap employment” (p. 282).
Because Brittany went through alternative certification her second year, her experience the first year was also very different than the other participants. She had no formal training before she stepped into the classroom and had little art experience to draw from. This resulted in a terrifying ordeal for her. It could be argued the struggles she went through during that time influenced and tainted her subsequent years of teaching. The description of her A.C. program’s course content is very similar to the other two participants, although the time-frames differed. Brittany’s program coursework took place over two summers and two semesters as opposed the much shorter program Tammy and Morgan went through.

Another large difference between Brittany’s narrative and the others’ narratives revolves around teaching styles. During her first year, Brittany was extremely controlling and inflexible. Students were not allowed to make creative decisions and projects were very formulaic and teacher-oriented with rigid guidelines. Brittany has loosened up in later years, but without any formal training, her initial teaching style suffered.

Because the events of Brittany’s experience are so different than the other two participants, it is difficult to comment on her perception of those experiences. It is safe to say her comfort in teaching has improved over the years; however, she views many of her past experiences around teaching with displeasure and has trouble viewing her career in teaching as a success.

The analysis and cross analysis of narratives was important for this research because of the way these stories were later represented. Beyond the depiction of events in participants’ narratives, the dispositions, beliefs, and perceptions of participants were better explicated as a result of this process and helped to more faithfully inform the construction of the graphic narrative.
It should be noted that I did not include an analysis of my narrative within this section. For one thing, a synopsis of my story has already been represented within this paper and I wanted to avoid redundancy. Secondly, the main purpose of analysis was to familiarize myself with participants and their narratives in order to inform the graphic narrative. I am already fully familiar with my narrative and the intricacies of how I view myself and my identity construction. Because of my role as researcher, I used my narrative in much the same way as the meta-narratives mentioned above, constantly comparing and contrasting participants’ stories with my own. My disposition, beliefs, and perceptions of alternative certification and novice art teaching is implicitly and explicitly shown throughout this research paper, both in the Critical Analysis and the Graphic Narrative portions.
Representation of Part II

Beyond the initial findings, the second part of this creative thesis is the graphic narrative: a compilation of the stories, observations, and beliefs of the art teacher participants. It includes elements of my story as a basis for context, but also consists of the narratives of participants. The final narrative and components of the research process is in the form of a graphic narrative, or comics, intermixing text and imagery to convey its meaning and/or message.

Representational Possibilities

Before beginning the interview, analysis, and re-interpretation of participants’ stories, the compilation of narratives held two possibilities in terms of representation. My initial hope was to compile all participant and researcher narratives into one, unanimous character and storyline. This would require the coalescing of narratives with one specific character, setting, and situation, symbolic of all participants’ stories, representing all viewpoints and experiences. A large part of each participant’s narratives might be excluded, depending on the themes that arose during the interview and analysis process. Creation of this story would be largely dependent on my interpretation of participant data, creating a certain bias as to the importance of individual experience. This form of representation, however, would provide a unified story that conveys the central meanings behind the narratives and would help the audience focus less on individual aspects and more on larger, pervasive themes. I believe this form of representation would be more appropriate if the data collected from interviews was similar in terms of themes and meanings derived from experience. This was a major assumption, so as a result, another possibility for representation was considered and eventually utilized.
The second possibility for representation within a graphic novel format was a montage of each individual’s (including the researcher’s) stories. I chose this format, which placed me, as the researcher and narrator, as the central character, explaining first the aspects of the research and then using my own novice teacher narrative as the baseline for the novel. The participants’ narratives were then imposed, juxtaposed, and connected to my story based on the general and emergent themes that arose in the interview and analysis processes. These stories were an extension and expansion of the themes that emerged to help define what was meaningful behind each participant’s experiences. In this format the representation separated characters and stories, making their contribution and meaning more individual and unique, similar to the vignettes used by McCoubrey (2000). Moreover, this storytelling strategy is utilized by Ayers and Alexander-Tanner (2010), as Ayers uses his classroom experiences for the backdrop of his graphic novel. As certain themes are explicated, Ayers uses the stories of other educators and students to accentuate the main meaning or purpose of each passage.

This form of representation was more appropriate to focus on unique and different aspects of individual stories. It showed the audience more diverse perspectives regarding art education and the contributions of participants were set apart to an extent. While I believed during the early stages of research that either format described above was appropriate, it was in the interview and analysis stage that it became clear the latter was best. It allowed for greater diversity in meanings and interpretation, giving the audience a much broader and richer picture of the experiences of novice art teachers.

The primitive example of my work in comics mentioned earlier shows a very early version of both the visual and textual style that belonged to the overall graphic narrative. Using both McCloud (1993) and Eisner’s (1996) practical advice on characterization, pacing, layout,
and other aspects of comics creation, I created a complex, but fluid graphic narrative that hopefully captures the teachers’ stories appropriately.

There were, however, several problems that arose involving aspects of pacing and layout. The biggest issue was creating a sense of fluidity for the audience in reading, viewing, and understanding the storyline. Compared to my primitive example, I utilized more panels to guide the viewer through the story and relied more on the gutter to connect moments and ideas. Another device used in terms readability was line-bridges between word bubbles and arrows connecting panels, explained more explicitly in the introduction of the graphic narrative. Another problem was ensuring imagery did not become subservient or even supplemental to text. I wanted to strike a balance between visual and textual elements and as a result I included several silent panels, without text, along with sections of minimal text where imagery was used for descriptive and interpretive purposes (McCloud, 1993, p. 103). Finally, the graphic narrative was done in black and white in order to convey more interpretive meaning upon the characters and storyline. Color, according to McCloud (1993), tends to objectify figures and objects, leaving the reader focusing more on the form than the meaning (p. 189).

The graphic narrative itself is full page with the layout and size similar to that of comic books. Initial page layouts were hand-drawn without the help of digital media and text was written in roughly to help negotiate size constraints. Once completed, all images and panels were hand-drawn separately, scanned, and uploaded digitally as image files. They were cleaned using image editing software and then pasted and arranged using Microsoft Publisher. Text was added and edits of the layout were made at several points to increase clarity, improve fluidity in pacing, and as a result of technical constraints.
Beyond the issue of literal representation, the participants were given editing rights to change, alter, or omit parts of the graphic narrative. After the introduction and each chapter were completed, each participant was sent a copy to edit and give feedback at their discretion. This step, while important in my mind, served little purpose within the editing process because all feedback from participants was positive and non-specific. I took this feedback as denoting approval. However, I also believe it illustrated a limitation I did not earlier perceive: that the fictionalization and mixing of narratives made the participants’ stories unidentifiable to even them. One significant example of this is the fact I chose to represent each participant’s character at different points in her teaching career. I even represented one character as having moved on from her teaching career despite the fact that, in reality, all three participants are still employed as teachers. I made this decision as an assumption based on certain participants’ implications concerning their future in teaching. As a result of this fictionalization, all three participants approved of my overall characterization of their world and, to them, anything objectionable or worth editing could not necessarily be identified with them.
Conclusions

The following three sections address recommendations based on research, further research beyond the scope of this study, and the significance of this study. Although these sections are written in the Critical Analysis portion of this thesis, they represent overall conclusions based on the completion of this and the graphic narrative portion.

Recommendations

Based on the narratives of participants and the reinterpretation of our stories, it is obvious there is no one isolating factor that contributes to successful art teaching or feelings of preparedness when first entering the field. Even teachers who go through the same teacher training programs have different experiences and perceptions as a result of their personal backgrounds, dispositions, and beliefs about what art teaching is or should be. There are, however, certain trends across narratives that outline what novice art teachers, alternative certification programs, school administrators, and the art education community could do to improve teacher quality in the art classroom.

The most prevalent aspect that led to confidence in teaching, which was different for all three participants, was visual art experiences and background through college. Teachers who participated in numerous art classes, programs, jobs, and community projects were more confident in their art-making ability and as a result were more comfortable taking risks and allowing students more freedom when they began teaching. It is important for teachers to either have this background or, if nothing else, to become practicing artists during their pre-service training and teaching careers.
Exposure to other art teachers and experiences within teacher training was another factor that influenced teacher confidence. Many alternative certification programs are too diversified in terms of participants’ needs to be able to address art education (Humphrey, Wechsler, & Hough, 2008). If there is only one art aspiring teacher in an entire program, there is very little incentive for the A.C. professors to address their needs. Creating alternative certification programs specifically designed to recruit art teachers and provide them with content tailored to art education is important. Despite logistical and practical limitations to creating programs like this, evidence of improvement and confidence gained from art-specific professional development and exposure to already successful art teachers in participants’ narratives is too potent to ignore.

In addition to art-specific content within alternative certification programs, it is also evident that mentorship within these programs should be carefully arranged and closely monitored. Some of the most rewarding experiences and devastating testimonies concerned student-mentor relationships during practicum and internship years for the participants in this research. Many times, the negative experiences were tied to bad match-making by the alternative certification program, either with mentors possessing no high school or visual art experience or, in one extreme case, with a person who possessed severe bias against alternatively certified teachers.

Because alternative certification has become such a pervasive part of the educational landscape (Humphrey et al., 2008; Zientek, 2007), it has become even more important for the art education community to provide access to quality professional development for new teachers. Although only one participant, Brittany, mentions this aspect explicitly, access to quality professional development was one of the most influential events and causes for improvement within her teaching. Beyond practical knowledge gained, becoming part of a community of art
teachers and empathizing with and learning from them can be powerful tools for art teacher education to empower teachers and diminish feelings of isolation.

Further Research

As the interview, analysis, and reinterpretation of participants’ narratives took place, there were two areas of interest that emerged outside the scope of this research: the role of school size and resource adequacy in alternative certification programs. Both present potential possibilities for further research to help alternatively certified art teachers.

First, more research is needed to examine the effect of school size on the level of support provided to novice teachers. The combination of Brittany’s and my experiences within a small school provided the setting for the graphic narrative. From our stories, and relative to Morgan’s and Tammy’s experiences in a larger school and district, the lack of resources to support teachers is unmistakable. Teachers are asked to take on too much responsibility, administrators do not have the time to assess new teachers, and the schools themselves, based on size and/or location, do not have access to teacher-training services (local, regional, university) that larger schools do. I would argue this lack of support does just as much to discourage new teachers from staying in their profession as does inadequate preservice training.

The need for further research is also apparent in the fact that different types of alternative certification programs possess unequal levels of access to the resources and connections needed to help new teachers. While Brittany’s program was university-based, which might imply better academic quality, they were not able to provide her with as much local support as the regionally based program in Tammy’s and Morgan’s narratives. I do not think further research would indicate that University programs are not in contact with the local community, but they are not
directly involved in the governance of local schools and districts. This involvement by regional service centers implies that their connections, in terms of jobs and resources provided to teachers in training, are more practically useful for participants than their university-based counterparts. Of course, these are assumptions based on my experiences along with the three participants within this study and may not represent a larger sample of experiences in alternative certification programs.

Significance

Beginning teachers with little art educational training have a very myopic understanding of what art education is and what it could be. This is dependent, to a degree, on their previous experiences around art teaching when they were students, as is evidenced by the narratives of participants. Regardless of this background, however, they do not possess the same knowledge base as those who go through traditional university-based art education programs. I myself knew when I started teaching that the elements of art and principles of design were the uncontested canon to successfully teach art. Through my master’s degree program, I realized (rather abruptly) the myriad of theoretical and practical possibilities that exist in the field beyond and in contention with my previous beliefs. A tension exists between new ways of thinking and traditional attitudes, especially in art teaching. The only reason I have been somewhat successful in assimilating these new methods into my teaching is because I was willing to take risks for the sake of innovative thinking/processes. However, there is no guarantee all art teachers in the future will possess such internal motivations.

I propose this research as a way to create easier access for new teachers in a field where new approaches are numerous and diverse. The participants in this research (including me)
represent, in a general sense, the group of alternatively certified teachers that comprise over 50% of all Texas teachers (Ramsay, 2011). Listening and understanding the processes by which these teachers construct their identities as educators is important for everyone involved in education in the state. By sharing the stories of alternatively certified novice art teachers, several changes would hopefully be put into motion. First, those hoping to get into the profession would have a better idea of the realities of teaching, regardless of the subject matter. For although I am focusing on art education, these stories in many ways are applicable to teachers across subject areas. Second, based on this project, certification program officers, administrators, and experienced teachers in the audience may be motivated to create and support the structures needed in order to help these novice teachers be successful. Regardless if it is a professional development workshop or an additional support system to help new teachers gain efficacy, spreading awareness of novice teachers’ struggles should create empathy for their position and action in helping them.

Finally, I hope this work will reach those currently in a situation similar to the stories presented. Specifically, educators who still exist within the “survival mode” of teaching, who might be unwilling to try innovation, not because they are incapable, but because in many cases it represents too much risk and discomfort. By reading the stories of others, they may gain confidence, seek the assistance of others, and start building on the experiences and skills they possess to teach more effectively.
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PART II

GRAPHIC NARRATIVE
There are many jobs in the modern world that society has come to rely on, that people depend on. Some of these jobs may seem obvious to you, while others are hidden in your day-to-day life.

These occupations not only provide services that people want, but also services they need to be successful. In some cases, they provide others with what they need to survive.
These types of careers typically require years of rigorous training and education that take extreme dedication to complete.

Jobs like these are not likely taken by those looking simply to make money.

People within these professions understand the importance that their roles play for society and individuals alike.

...Now Just Imagine

...What it would be like if those people weren't well-trained,

Flight 363, did you bring up your landing gear?!?!
...If they didn’t grasp the understanding necessary...

...to be truly effective (in other words GOOD) at their jobs...

Terrifying isn’t it?
Am I being a bit dramatic... of course.

But if we relate this to teachers, then you can probably see where this is going...

If these types of jobs demand a high level of accountability and education,

Why wouldn’t we want that for jobs within education itself?

Education is the basic component of any great society...

...and it is an integral part of why we thrive as human beings. Our very survival depends on it.

Why wouldn’t we want teachers to be some of the most highly trained, highly educated individuals...

...in what has become a highly complex age.
The argument for the professionalization of teachers has gone on in the United States for over the past 100 years (McNabb, 2004).

In the last thirty years, the issue has been compounded with the introduction of alternative certification teacher training (Dial & Stevens, 1993).

These programs offer potential teachers a less-expensive, faster, and typically less rigorous entry-point into the field of education versus traditional university training.

Arguments for alternative certification include...

- Bringing in experts from other fields.
- Increasing access to teaching jobs.
- Improved standards for teacher preparation.

(Bradshaw, 1998; Brewer, 2006; Fenstermacher, 1990; Shen, 1997; Zumwalt, 1996).

...And arguments against it include...

- Wholly ineffective training.
- Less committed teachers.
- The de-professionalization of teaching.

(Brewer, 2006; Fenstermacher, 1990; Humphrey, Wechsler, & Hough, 2008; Shen, 1997; Zientek, 2007).

Sorry. Got a little dramatic again. Perhaps it's time to look at this more objectively.
My research looks at the experiences of alternatively certified teachers in conjunction with a very specific field of teaching: art education.

As an administrator and art teacher at a small high school in Texas, I noticed that many alternatively certified teachers weren’t as well prepared as their traditional, university-trained counterparts.

According to the Texas State Board of Education, over 50% of teachers in the state of Texas alone are alternatively certified and twice as many of these types of teachers quit by the end of their third year compared to traditional certification (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

Many art teachers go through the same challenges that face all beginning teachers... I know I did. Unfortunately, most Alternative certification programs don’t usually address art education as a specific subject and neither does the research on alternative certification...

...That’s because most alternative programs were created with math and science in mind (Shen, 1997).

The point here is not to bash alternative certification, but to listen and understand those art teachers who’ve gone through it, so that hopefully the educational community can improve all teacher training, increase teacher retention, and cut down on attrition costs.

For this research, I talked with several art teachers about their experiences both in A.C. training and in their first years of teaching. I included myself as a participant, because I too went through an A.C. program at the beginning of my teaching career. The stories in chapter one and two are a compilation of our experiences.
First, you might be wondering, why storytelling?

In other words, I want to help contribute to the general identity of alternatively certified art teachers so that people understand their position and what they go through.

Well, according to Bruner (1986) narrative itself is a way of making sense of the world around us and is an act of knowing and developing meaning for individuals.

It’s a story I think is worth telling.

Second, I should probably explain why I chose a comics format for the narrative.

For one thing, the combination of text and imagery can hold different interpretive possibilities for the content of the stories told.

It can have a subtle effect on the meaning of an image...

...or it can change the entire message.

I DON’T CARE! I’D RATHER SLEEP— THAN CALL EMILY FOR HELP!
Sure images can add reinforcement to existing text, but they can also add meaning and change how a reader views events. They can create humor, change the pace of the story, and give insight into what characters are going through. In addition to adding interpretive possibilities, the comics format can also provide clarity to ideas and events within stories.

Visual imagery can be used to enhance and intensify the reader’s understanding of characters, events, and setting. This is an understanding that might not be possible with text alone.

This being my first try at creating a graphic narrative, there were some problems worth mentioning. Sequencing and leading the reader through the page was difficult, so I added two components to help. Lines bridging word bubbles together... ...like this one... ...and arrows connecting panels.

Both are elements used by graphic artists such as McCloud (1993) and Eisner (1996). Hopefully, the arrangement of text and images doesn’t leave anyone feeling too nauseated.
Another difficulty was using imagery as its own storytelling device and not just as a supplement to text. As Gordon (2010) explains, the graphic format is superficial at best if the image could easily be replaced by words. It's only worth it if both text and image are used to their full potential to try and tell a story.

With this in mind, there are some pages that are a bit heavy in imagery, while in others text is dominant. All in all, I'd like to think I've achieved a good balance overall between the two.

Well, I think I've bored you enough with all the justifications and explanations for this subject.

I hope you enjoy the story.
Chapter One

When they first offered me the job I said...

When I did that, I knew there were only two options:
1. Quit—Move onto another job at another school; or...
2. Stay—Give up teaching art and take the job as the assistant principal.

It was my first school and my first real job. I loved the students, my coworkers, and I loved being part of what I considered a valuable education system.

Despite all the problems, and despite the path that I knew it would lead down, my answer eventually needed to be “yes”.

Two years later the head principal, my mentor, stopped down... She couldn’t take the instability and chaos of the district. I originally said “no” because I saw what happened to young staff who advanced too quickly, like her... but now I was stuck. When they asked me to take her place, I didn’t have much training for administration...

... just a few grad school classes.

But I said “yes” to that too... And here I am, running a school where six years earlier I was just a first year art teacher.
Hey Phil,

Thanks again for having me at your school last month. I really enjoy working with your students and showing them what I know. I’ve enjoyed it so much over the last few years that I’m looking into teaching art this upcoming school year. I’m currently researching certification programs in the hopes of getting the best training possible. My aunt and sister are both teachers who received their bachelor’s in education, and I’ve been able to talk to them about that option. I’m not at all interested in returning to school at this point and couldn’t afford it even if I wanted to. So I was wondering if you could share some wisdom on alternative certification. I know you went through it (as well as getting your master’s) and probably know several other art teachers who’ve done it as well. I’ve read a lot online (good and bad) but I’d like to hear from people who’ve actually been through alternative certification. Anyway, I hope things are going well with you and I’d appreciate any advice or help you could offer.

Thanks,

Kirby

Hey Kirby,

I’m glad to hear you’ve taken an interest in teaching art. I feel like you’d have a lot to offer a school with all your years of experience. I’m not sure if I’m the best person to talk about alternative certification since I wasn’t very impressed with the program I went through. I can talk to some of my other teachers and see if they had a different experience. I’ll get back to you in a couple of days.

Take it easy,

Philip

...And then I headed to bed.

I usually get up pretty early...
...and head into work around 7:30 am. The nicest part is the ten minute walk from the parking lot...

...to the front door...

Morgan is usually at the school first. She’s there when I show up. Most other teachers arrive just before the first bell. Morgan’s been an art teacher here since before I was hired six years ago. Because of that, I think she’s easier to talk to than most of the other teachers. She’s a bit more honest with me about everything.

Good morning Morgan.

Mornin’ Philip.

Thanks again for doing morning duty.

A couple of students had a problem this morning. I talked to both of them and they’re sitting outside your office.

I was just revising my lesson plan for what we’re doing today...

Painting Self-Portraits. It was the first project I ever did. I still remember my first week teaching like it was yesterday.

You sure you remember that far back? I wasn’t even a senior in college.

Think you’re funny, huh?

First Day Activi

NAME:

HOBBIES:

PETS:

FAVORITE:

FOOD:

I remember we were doing an icebreaker on the first day. When I asked what they liked to do...

...one of them said...

...I like to smoke Ganja

I was completely beside myself...

...luckily I wasn’t too naïve, so I told him to see me after class and we handled it then. Beyond that, I never had too many behavior issues.
Being a first year teacher was hard. Still, between my mom being a teacher and my certification program, I felt prepared.

How’d you get certified?

I did alternative certification. They gave us all kinds of problem-solving exercises and scenarios to deal with. They even helped me after I started teaching....

...One day early in the year I noticed that my students weren’t understanding my instructions, not even a little bit... I would finish explaining an art project and they would just stare at me without a clue.

I contacted my program and they sent out a specialist to observe me.

After about five minutes, he figured out that I was talking way too fast. So fast, even he was having trouble following me.

I started to slow things down and the students got everything pretty easy after that. I thought I’d gone crazy, but it turned out to be something small and relatively easy to fix...it was great feedback.

I really enjoyed that program. You know, Tammy went through the same program at the same time. You should talk to her about it. Her version of things is probably very different from mine.

Funny you should mention it, I’m having drinks with her after school just to catch up. You should come.

Right. Thanks. See you at lunch.

Speaking of certification, I need to talk to Britney about how her program is going.

But...First things first...

Maybe next time. Hey, don’t forget about those kids outside your office.
Most days there are typically one or two students sitting outside my office door...

More often than not, there's usually one or two teachers as well.

It can get kind of rough around here.

Some teachers tell me exactly what they need, while others don't feel comfortable doing that, me being their superior and all...

...Most of the teachers hate it here...

...the students aren't all that happy to be here either.

Maybe it's not that bad....

...Most kids don't like school anyways...

...And maybe only half of the teachers hate it here....

...It's just hard to tell sometimes.

Last week we had another teacher quit. Second one this year and it's not even Spring Break yet.

He couldn't handle the classroom... At least that's what I tell myself.

He quit by phone.

YOU WHAT??!

Maybe it's my fault...
I wish we could pay them even close to what the bigger districts pay...

...I remember my first year...

Probably similar to Brittney's experience...

...If we weren't so small, maybe they wouldn't all be new teachers, often fresh out of alternative certification...

...I remember how it felt when all the students filed in on the first day... it was terrifying.

Good morning everyone! Here's what we're doing today in art class...

Come in and take your seats.

That's really good, Daniel.

Oh God I'm tired.

When I'm this tired, I wish I'd found a different job. I can't remember the last time I wasn't tired...

At least it's not as bad as it used to be...

...Last year was the worst. I still remember getting up in front of the class the first day. I'm sure I looked normal, but inside I'd never been more terrified.
If you must know, I really wanted to be a graphic designer...

...But as it turns out, there aren't many of those jobs around these days...

A little over a year ago, my husband said I should be an art teacher...

...He'd found a position at a small high school...

...I'd taken a few art classes in college but I wasn't very good at it...

...The teaching position opened up mid-year, so they hired me without any real certification...

...Guess they were desperate.

It was bad right from the start.

I had no idea what to teach them. I'd heard you're supposed to teach the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards, so we covered those first.

But that only took a week. The next two weeks I taught the Elements of Art and Principles of Design, per the advice of another teacher...

...I'm not entirely sure I taught those right. After that, I just started making stuff up. It was awful. I just wanted to keep the kids working and under control.

...If I could do that, I figured I was golden.
Now it’s my second year and I’m so tired...

The teaching part is easier. You could even say I enjoy it.

But now Phil wants me taking on more...

More classes... More committees... More after-school programs... And on top of all that, they’ve asked me to get certified. Which means not only did I do summer coursework...

...but after the school day is over, I have to drive 45 minutes to night classes twice a week.

And it feels like everything is snowballing

I know it’s not Phil’s fault, but it’s so much pressure for a new teacher.

Speak of the devil.

Hi Brittany,

I wanted to remind you about the ARD meeting at 3 pm today. I know it’s during your planning, but it’s the only time we could schedule it. Also, don’t forget I want to meet with you tomorrow about how you’re A.C. program is going. Does that work for you?

Hope classes are going well,

Philip

At least he wants to know how things are going in person. Usually an email is all you can hope for.

I wish I knew how I was doing, really...

It just gets so isolating when no one is telling you that you’re doing well...

If only I could get just a little feedback...
Sometimes I think the new teachers here are too nervous to talk to me about their problems...

...I wish I could help them out, at least lighten their load. Take Brittany; she's not the greatest art teacher, but she's trying really hard. Hopefully she's getting something out of her alternative certification program.

Mine was a joke. It was a for-profit A.C. program.

For two weeks, a woman went over the basics of teaching: lesson plans, classroom management, child development, and what-not. We did some practice lessons in small groups. We even planned our first week of school.

It seemed very helpful at the time. Then again, none of us there really knew what the classroom would be like.

Then for the next two weeks, we sat in an even bigger room, almost five hundred of us. Throughout that time we listened to...

..Principals...

..Politicians...

..and other former educators talk about what school was like for them along with why we were so important.

...ZZZZZZZ. ZZZZZZZ. ZZZZZZ

Their stories were meant to inspire but held little practical purpose. Unfortunately, I ended up sleeping through most of that portion...

(You try to stay awake through 8 hours of lecture)
Not once did the program mention art.

Really they didn't talk much about any subjects, just strategies and stories for general teaching.

I couldn't help but feel like we were being pushed through some sort of teacher factory.

Where is everyone?

Really?

Even my assigned program mentor, the man who came to observe me during my first year of teaching, didn't seem to care much. Once (out of three total visits) he came in on the wrong day, during my planning time. He first got angry with me for not informing him of my schedule. When he finally realized the mistake was his, he wrote me a perfect review, despite leaving before observing any of my classes.

Problem is, now I feel like I'm doing the same thing, or even less for my teachers. I promised myself when I got into administration that I was going to look after the art program, but now there's simply no time.

...I've got to worry about test scores or the superintendent will have my neck.

And if she boots me, the next person is even less likely to care about the arts.

Ten minutes later.

Two minutes later.

Damn! I forgot about that report.
Yes, man. I'll finish it...

...So what did my son do this time?

Hey Morgan. Sorry about lunch today. I got a little swamped.

Hey Phil.

Is there anyone still out there?

No worries. We can try again tomorrow. I'm heading home. You look like you've still got some work to do.

Email: A Memory Full!!!

Yeah. Not staying long though. About to meet with Tammy.

Ah. Well have fun. Tell her I said 'hi'.

Sure thing. See you tomorrow.
So do you miss it?

Miss what? Having you as my boss...yeah right. I got you a beer.

Very funny. Thanks.

Ahh. It's been rough.

'Bout the only thing I miss is the students. How's work going?

Remember the art teacher I got to replace the teacher who replaced you?

She's kind of struggling with the load.

Tammy's an old colleague of mine.

I taught art with her and Morgan before I got into administration.

We still keep in touch from time to time...usually over drinks.

She originally left to go to another school with higher pay and a better environment. Recently, however, she's left teaching altogether.
Sometimes I wish I could give her more guidance. What influenced you when you first started?

I decided when I started that I was going to teach the opposite way of my art teachers growing up.

Shut up... Really?

Yes really... Every year I would explain to the parents and students that I wanted the kids to have a different experience than the one I had.

I didn't want to be super-structured, where the students had to do everything I told them without exception...

...without any creativity or freedom.

I couldn't stand my art teacher in high school. My junior year she quit...

...and even though they shut down the entire high school art program, I couldn't have been happier. It wasn't until college that I really liked my art teachers. My drawing teacher was especially helpful. I had so much trouble so he researched different approaches to help me because it was that important. After several tries, he even told me, "The way I'm teaching you isn't working, so I want you to sit with this person and see if they can help".

When it came to my classroom, I used a lot of what my college professors taught me.

You know, Morgan was saying that you two went to the same certification program.

Was that program helpful when you started teaching art?

Oh yeah...

Morgan and I went through the regional service center and had a great teacher. Her name was Janet. We're still friends today. I could always talk to her about my teaching.
With alternative certification programs, I think the teacher can make all the difference. Janet actually left the program halfway through (I'll get to that here in a minute) and was replaced by this awful guy. I've heard of a lot of people who had awful instructors in their alternative program. I've even met a few people who went through our same program in later years and absolutely hated it. We were very fortunate to have Janet for the time we did.

I really thought Janet was helpful. We would go through the TEKS for art and collaborate with other teachers, both in art and other subjects. I think that helped us gain multiple perspectives on how to teach.

There was a ton of reading and studying, although we were able to finish most of it in class. Janet was constantly coming up with classroom scenarios and problems for us to solve.

Plan A
Plan B
Plan C

She taught us how to be flexible and to always have backup plans in case something didn't work...

...and taught us how to create relationships with our students.

The program itself was a year and a half: intense coursework the first six months, a two week practicum...

...and then another year or so while you worked as a first year teacher.

Problem was, Janet left the program after the first semester...

We want you to teach it this way...

Un fortunately, today will be my last day. Good luck, I know you'll all be very successful.

Don't Go!

Noo!!

Ah man, not fair.

She didn't agree with how the program's management wanted things taught.

We were all pretty upset about it.
The Right Way to Teach!

We still had almost a year left and they brought in an instructor who was awful. This new guy showed us videos and slideshows of what the program said we should be learning.

* No Collaborating
* No Role-playing
* No Discussions
* No Electives Subjects

Sounds like your program was more interesting than mine.

Like I said, I think it all depends on your teacher.

At one point he told me that I had nothing significant to offer the group since I was not a core subject teacher...

...So I got up and walked out.

Luckily by then the classes were only a few times a month since everyone still in the program had jobs. I had a job, paid for the program, and passed all the required tests, so they certified me.

Not as much for art, just general teaching. Janet wasn’t concerned with what you’d be teaching so much as showing you all the basics of teaching. I’m sure you can guess how the second guy felt about art.

In fact, the really scary thing was my first sub job: teaching sex ed... Scary and hilarious.

I’m not sure I would say the alternative certification program prepared me to teach art, and it was difficult at first. It took a lot of time, but eventually I got the hang of it and really started to enjoy teaching.

And it wasn’t that scary going into the classroom because I felt like I was prepared by her. In addition, I’d also been substitute teaching a year before that.
Then how come you quit?

Well, I got tired of working for you...

Why? You thinking about quitting.

Haha.

Not education so much. I just wish I could get back to teaching art again.

Well you know what I enjoyed the most about teaching art?

Yeah, but then you push them a little and they work on it until it's a success. Watching a student fail and then pick themselves up was what I really loved.

What's that?

It was watching the students start a piece of art saying, "I can't do this" and then watching them fall down.

That's a strange thing to enjoy.

Think I should head home but I'll email you soon. Take it easy, Phil.

Well if you ever want, we sure could use you back at the school...

...and if you ever want to quit, I've always got advice ready for you.
I could list a hundred things I love about teaching art...

I wish I could think of one thing I love about my job now...

What am I going to tell Kirby?...

Morgan really seemed to love her program, but then again, she’s so positive she’d probably think any program was great. I still need to talk to Brittany but if her struggles are any indication, her program probably wasn’t that great. That leaves Tammy, who said it’s basically hit or miss depending on the professor, not the program. I suppose that means my program was a huge miss.

Oh well. I’ll deal with it all tomorrow. I hope I can sleep in a little bit...
Chapter Two

This morning I woke up early. The district can’t afford an automated substitute teacher system, so two to three times a week I get a phone call from a “sick” teacher. Sometimes I get more than one call. The good days are when I can find a sub quickly and go back to bed...

...today is not one of those days.
Hey Phil. You get a chance to meet up with Tammy? How's she doing?

Mornin' Morgan. She's good. We had a lot of fun last night. We talked a lot about your program and what she thought of it.

Oh yeah... and what did she have to say?

She liked it too. I guess you guys really enjoyed having Janet as your teacher for the first half of the program.

Oh yeah. She was great. It's a shame, she was under so much pressure to do things the way the program wanted.

Sometimes she did it their way and we would end up looking at prescribed slide-shows or learn about etiquette, like how to write an email.

I think that's why she quit.

Sounds awful...

...but it also sounds like she taught y'all some useful stuff too.

Even for art.

She recognized that Tammy and I needed some help with art and she also knew that she couldn't really be the person to do that. She didn't know anything about teaching art, so she actually brought in an experienced art teacher to talk with us about what it was like and how we could start planning. It was great.

You're imagining yourself as the expert art teacher aren't you?

Huh?...

No... That's cool though. I wonder why Tammy didn't mention that?
Don’t forget, we went through it like eight years ago. She probably just doesn’t remember.

She definitely remembered the guy who came in to replace Janet. He sounded dreadful.

Yeah. He was pretty bad.

Luckily by then we didn’t have class very often. You know what I really hated though? My two week practicum was awful...

Yeah. Can you believe it? All I can figure is that she wanted the extra money for being a mentor so she told them she would do it.

We were supposed to be assigned a teacher and work with them in the classroom for two weeks near the end of the school year. I got assigned to a woman who hated alternative certification teachers.

Your program assigned her?

Lotta’ good you’ll do...

She was constantly telling me how poor I was doing. After the practicum was finished, she told me she wasn’t going to recommend me for certification. I was heartbroken. Fortunately my program backed me up and when she couldn’t provide any evidence of my supposed poor performance, they went through and certified me. I found out later that she quit her job the following year.
Sounds like a nightmare.

Yeah, I was really distraught. But then I got hired by Alice here at Urban.

I remember you guys talking about her. She's the woman who I replaced, right?

She was our mentor when we first started but she retired soon after.

Yeah. She brought Tammy and I in together.

...Well for that you'll need to ask Tammy. I really liked Alice though. I thought she was really helpful. She was paid by our program and she would observe us and tell us how we were doing.

Just when I thought it would be a good day...

...and I will remember lunch today.

Funny, I seem to remember Tammy talking about how she didn't like Alice...

Speaking of helpful, I helped a wonderful student to a seat outside your office. He was fooling around in the cafeteria.

Hey Morgan

Hey Brittney. How's it going?

Well, I have to meet with Phil about my A.C. program. Any advice?

Just be honest. He needs to know how things are really going...

I know, I just get nervous.

I don't want him to think I can't handle everything and I don't want him thinking I don't like my program either.

I know the feeling. Still, it's better if he knows. He might be able to help.

...As opposed to making him think that everything's perfect.
Hey Philip.
You wanted to see me?

Oh hi Brittney,
Don't worry about him, he won't be here much longer. Come on in.

Oh God?
Watch it lady.

I'll be calling your mom this afternoon.

So how are you doing?

You mind if we jump right in?

Good.

I've rather do hers since mine is sooo far away.

Yes sir. I picked it because Morgan suggested I shouldn't pursue her old program. She said it's gone a bit downhill.

Yes sir. It's really rigorous and the other people in the program are really helpful. They're really good about getting us to collaborate in groups.

So your A.C. program is university based, right?

Getting grouped with secondary teachers is great because I get to see what other subjects do.

The instructor is really great too. She's extremely down to earth and practical about teaching.

I just wish there were at least a few experienced teachers there. I've already taught for a semester and I feel like some of these new teachers have no clue what they're talking about.

...And getting stuck with the elementary teachers feels like a waste of time.

Everyone seems so much older than me and many of them are switching careers to become math and science teachers.

It would be nice if there was at least one other art teacher.

Are you liking it?

Oh yes sir.

I guess so.

Has it been helpful for your teaching?
So they teach you a lot of practical applications, huh? Any theory related to teaching?

Yeah. I appreciate the theory, but I think the practical advice comes in handy more once you get in the classroom.

What good is THEORY when you’ve got a bunch of kids going crazy in your classroom?

Is there anything about your program you don’t like?

Well, Morgan and I went to a conference this summer hosted by the statewide arts organization that was really great.

Well sir, everything is going okay, but sometimes it feels like there too much to do. The program’s good, but I’ve already been teaching and so some of the material doesn’t seem like it would work for our students. It seems almost silly.

And when I have to drive 45 minutes both ways, sometimes it feels like a waste of time.

It would also be nice if there was any training specifically for the visual arts.

I’ve been talking with other teachers, including Morgan, about their alternative certification and it doesn’t sound like any programs offer anything specific for art.

Is there anything we could be doing to help?

Where do I start? No, no. One thing at a time. Try to focus on the positive.
It was so helpful being around other art teachers who had experience and wanted to help out. It was a bit intimidating, but I got to meet teachers in similar situations who understand what it’s like.

Even the older teachers were really supportive and liked sharing their ideas. You think we could do more stuff like that?

We did all kinds of hands-on projects that I’ve been able to use in the classroom.

Oh yeah. A lot. Sometimes it’s just nice talking with someone who knows all the students. She’s good for advice on how to handle certain students and any problems that come up in general.

I used to love going to those things. There are some hoops to jump through, but I’ll see what I can do. Morgan’s really good at finding that kind of thing. You enjoy working with her?

Yeah. She’s okay. She’s good about observing me, but most of her advice is too general to be any real help. She’s the only person the program could find in this area, but she’s actually a retired elementary school teacher.

What about your program mentor? They gave you one of those, correct?

Ah geez. Well let’s see if we can get you in more trainings and maybe we can also check on this mentor thing too.

Thanks a lot, Phil.

Keep up the good work Brittney...
“Keep up the good work”. Is that all I get? Still, it’s nice that he wants to know how things are going. It sounds like he might even deliver on some cool art professional development. I guess I just need to be more up front with what I need.

Awesome...now all I have to do is convince the superintendent that we need more money for professional development for art teachers.

I can already see how that phone call will go...

That’s right...more money...

Oh well, it’s worth a shot...

Sometimes I feel like my entire job is to be the buffer between the teachers and the upper administration. Between the teachers and the policies handed down. It’s only now that I appreciate how hard my old boss must have worked to try and shield us from all that.

Hmm...Late again. No wonder he’s so skinny. Runnin’ around like he can fix every thing.

FIGHT!!!

FIGHT!!!

Seems like yesterday he was in the same position Brittney is.

He seemed like he enjoyed teaching art so much.
He would always get so excited when he’d come up with a new lesson or when any of his classes went well. He would come find Tammy and I just to show us what he was going to do in class that day.

Now he’s stuck trying to run a school that even the most experienced administrator would have trouble keeping up with.

I saw you talked with Brittney earlier today... so what’s with all the questions about first year teaching and certification?

Oh one of my old friends wants to get certified and be an art teacher. You remember Kirby? I figure I should see what other people went through since my experience wasn’t all that great.

Well if that’s the case, let me say this. I really loved my alternative certification program...

...but even to this day I still feel inferior to art teachers who went through a bachelors program for education. I know a lot of people and schools don’t like alternative certification and sometimes even I don’t like telling people how I was trained.
I really am grateful though because I love teaching art and my alternative certification program enabled me to pursue that.

And sure, there are times when I feel like I'm losing it and teaching art gets a little old... especially when the students are acting crazy. The biggest shock I had coming into teaching is that not all kids want to take art.

At this point though, I figure I'll be in education for the rest of my life. Maybe someday I'll try something different there, like counseling or something. I don't think I could leave for something else and I definitely don't think I could teach a different subject.

I've tried other things. Like Tammy, I had several jobs before I got into teaching. The thing is, art has been a part of my life since I was little. I've done every kind of art you can think of and now I've practically taught it all too. It was great in college because not only did I get to take a little of everything, but my professors became the models for the way I teach now.

My professors based their classes less on skill-building and more on visual problem-solving. They would always come up with a puzzle or prompt that forced students to think critically about how they were going to approach and execute a problem. I try my best to do the same in my own teaching.
I think if you do alternative certification, you end up basing your teaching a lot more on your previous teachers because you don’t have as much of a foundation (as opposed to people who earn education degrees). I don’t think however, that means you can’t be a successful alternatively certified teacher. I mean, look at all of us, including Brittney...

Speaking of Brittney, I have a favor to ask...

Oh Goodness, are you planning on paying me for this favor?

Probably not. I need you to be an informal mentor for her, which you’ve already been doing to an extent. She needs help with the little things, and I don’t have the time. I really think she just needs some reassurance that she’s doing well.

Sure. Somebody’s got to do your job right.

Thanks. I have to get back to work.
TammyArt12 — “Hey Phil, I had fun last night. It’s been a while since I’ve talked about how I got started in teaching.”

AdminPhil82 — “I had fun, too. I need to decompress from time to time. How come you didn’t mention Alice when you talked about your first year? I’ve heard you weren’t very fond of her.”

TammyArt12 — “Yeah. I wasn’t completely honest last night about my first year. I said it wasn’t hard but it really was. So hard I almost quit before the end of the first semester. I never had any classroom or student problems, but Alice and I didn’t get along at all. She would come into my classroom and yell at me because I wasn’t teaching the way she wanted. I know her and Morgan got along great, but I couldn’t stand her.”

AdminPhil82 — “What stopped you from quitting?”

TammyArt12 — “My students actually came to my house over the weekend, afraid that I was going to quit. They asked me to stay, so I worked through it. That, and my husband was very supportive, which was helpful.”

AdminPhil82 — “Wow…”

TammyArt12 — “Yeah. Speaking of quitting, you should know that the reason I left last year wasn’t because of anything going on at the school.”

AdminPhil82 — “Oh yeah?”

TammyArt12 — “I just got kind of bored with teaching. It’s not that I didn’t like doing it, I just think it’s in my nature to try new things. My kids are out of school now and there are several other interests that I’d like to pursue. In terms of the school or the staff, I didn’t have any problems…I do really miss the students too…”
TammyArt12— ...And as far as your predicament, I only have one piece of advice: If you used to be truly happy and now you're not, then you should go back to the way it was when you were happy. Gotta run Phil. Bye.

AdminPhil82— Thanks for the advice Tammy. Talk to you later.

Finally, I can leave on time. I should email Kirby before I leave.

Hey Kirby,

I've thought a lot about your question regarding alternative certification and talked to several art teachers as well. I've come to some conclusions based on these talks, both negative and positive. Hopefully this will be helpful in guiding you in the best direction.

As you know, I didn't enjoy my experience in alternative certification and certainly didn't think it was very useful. In terms of art as a discipline, I don't think you'll be able to find an alternative certification program capable of training you to the fullest extent, especially when compared with traditional university programs. They simply cannot provide extensive, rigorous training and an art-specific perspective, regardless of the logistics of the particular program.

With that being said, it is easy for me to see why many people choose alternative certification, and my reasoning is not as gloomy as it once was. Many people who possess the passion to teach have reached a point in their lives where they cannot afford (whether time or money) to go back to school for their degree. Everyone I've spoken with found that success in their alternative certification program was largely based on their teacher. If they had a good teacher who supported them and gave them the proper resources, they graduated from their program feeling prepared and had relative success once in the classroom. It helped if they'd already had an extensive background in the arts and were willing to commit themselves to further professional development once they had begun teaching. Other factors influencing perceived success included the teachers' practicums, program mentors, and the specific topics covered by the programs. Unfortunately everyone had different experiences, some even from within the exact same program. You're going to have to put in quite a bit of work to find an alternative certification program that is a good fit for you. If you'd like, I'm sure the teachers I've talked to would be more than happy to give you specific information on their programs. I'll ask them first but then send you their emails...
...Over the years, I've known many art teachers and in my experience, those who are alternatively certified are less likely to stay with teaching. That doesn't mean that you can't be successful by going through that route. If you truly enjoy doing something, you'll commit yourself to it and continue to improve regardless of how you initially started.

Hopefully this was helpful and good luck with the search,

Philip