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# Torn Between Two Worlds: Role and Identity in Hybrid Teacher Leadership

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# Role and Identity in Hybrid Teacher Leadership

by

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of the requirements for the degree of
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## DEDICATION

To my mom, Rose M. Jones, my dad, Gary W. Jones, my best friend and “un-biological sister” Dawn Jones, and my dear sweet Nini. Without you all, none of this would have ever been possible. Thank you, and I love you all to the moon and back.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In late December of 2013, I had a wild thought: I decided to go back to school. I was three semesters into my teacher leader position and was feeling good about the work. When hired for the position, I was told I would likely need to return to the classroom in three years; I decided to take steps to ensure the classroom to which I returned would not be at the high school level. My current MA in adult education and distance learning, while helpful to the career for which I aimed at the time, did not have much use in the nearby community college. I set my sights on 18 credit hours of English at the master's level and registered for the Spring 2014.

Rushing into it headlong before I could change my mind, I signed up for an English rhetoric class. I bought a binder and a notebook, filled a bag with pencils, pens, and highlighters, and grabbed my laptop. I was ready. That is, I was ready until I arrived in class and found the course was part of a cohort of English majors who would be seeking their Ph.D. I was one hundred pages of reading behind on the first night; the professor made it abundantly clear that evening I was not up for this challenge. I stayed the length of the session, then made my way to the parking lot vowing to drop the class the very same evening. Childishly, my feelings hurt, I cried all the way home.

I tell this portion of the story because I am grateful to the professor for what he did that evening. He could have allowed me to stay, to be miserable, to possibly fail. But he instead chose to enlighten me about the course and explain the ramifications of staying. He was clear

and I understood what I needed to do. It did not feel good, but I understood. I appreciate his transparency.

Once I dried my tears, I dropped the course and decided not to give up. I found another course Teaching Written Composition and decided to register. As I entered the classroom the next evening, I was greeted by the most welcoming individual. Throughout the remainder of the course, Dr. Janet Richards, Ph.D., welcomed us to the table each week to orally publish our compositions from different genres of writing. With Janet's leadership, our group of distinct personalities became a group of friends. Though the course was rigorous, with writings to complete each week, I savored every moment of it. Janet was the first to propose the idea of a Ph.D. in English Education to me. Though I had considered one day completing a Ph.D., I knew I would not be able to complete it in time to be considered for a community college position at the end of my teacher leader position. Janet encouraged me not to waste time, to go for what I really want, and to not accept half-measures. I completed my application and was admitted. I have Janet to thank for gently shoving me towards what I desired, but did not believe at first I could do. Her belief has sustained me, and I hope I have made her proud.

I first met Dr. Pat Jones, Ph.D., by phone. She was kind enough to interview me by phone for entrance to the English Education Ph.D. program. I must admit, I do not remember much about the conversation. I had many other things on my mind, and I was packing for a short trip out of town with my parents. I am not sure why Pat agreed to enroll me, but I am glad she did. Her advice, from which classes to take to how to complete an annual review, were a source of continuity and comfort during the entire process. I am grateful she invited me to the Tampa Bay Writing Project, and the opportunity to see my work published in the anthology. She is an exceptionally talented writer, and I am pleased she agreed to be on my committee.

My first instructor once I entered the program was Dr. Luke Rodesiler, Ph.D. He was no-nonsense and had a dry wit. I was always amazed by the quantity and quality of the comments he gave on my work. He was also the first to tell me about the importance of being an active member of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and going to conferences. Though I miss seeing him on a regular basis, I know I will see him at the next conference.

Dr. Michael Sherry, Ph.D., has been my instructor for the bulk of my classes. He also invited me to help him with his research, which allowed me to see my name published in an academic journal for the very first time. I appreciate his kind efforts as major professor on my committee to keep me on-track and his ability to know when I needed time away from my work to gain perspective. I will always be grateful to him for guiding me through this process.

Dr. Rebecca Burns, Ph.D. is the latest member of my committee, stepping in and saving my chance at completing my dissertation. Given her status as "last to the party" she has had exceptional questions which have allowed me to think about my reader and the ways in which my autoethnography would need better detail. I appreciate her presence and her contributions.

I met Dawn Jones the first year of my position as an HTL. She was the reading coach on campus, and we found we had more in common than just our last name. We bonded over both tears and laughter, coffee breaks and BOGOs at our favorite restaurant, crazy job responsibilities and going back to school. She is the sister I never had, and I hope I can always call her my friend. I appreciate her for listening, encouraging, and allowing me to rant when needed.

Ameshia Whitely-Cooper was my roommate the first year I was in the Hybrid Teacher Leader role. Though she really did not like me in her space at first, we ended up being good friends. I have had the joy of watching her two beautiful daughters grow, the first who was on the way when I met Ameshia. How time flies! I appreciate our talks and our laughter.

My family means everything to me. Early in my life, my dad was in the Army, and we travelled all over with him as he was stationed at different bases. Although we had extended family in Minnesota, in our day-to-day lives it was always just the three of us. Mom, dad, me: "the three musketeers." My parents raised me to believe I could accomplish anything if I put my mind to it. They were supportive of my aspirations to attain this degree, sacrificing family time when I needed to work on homework or study for a test. Cancer took my dad away in September of 2016, so now it is just mom and me. Though we are a "musketeer" down, my mom is twice the motivator now that he is gone, and I am not certain which of us is more excited for this Ph.D. I know my dad would be proud.

To the many others not mentioned by name who have cheered me on through the years of study, I appreciate you and thank you.

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## ABSTRACT

Roles of Hybrid Teacher Leadership (HTL), positions which involve classroom teaching for part of the day and academic coaching, curriculum planning, department chair, or professional development responsibilities for the remainder of the day, are becoming more prevalent due to budgetary concerns and teacher shortages. This autoethnography analyzes the first year of my experience as a Hybrid Teacher Leader in a school district in the Southeastern United States to gain knowledge of my enactment of the role, the ways in which I can learn more about myself as an educator and an academic coach from my experiences in the role, and the ways in which others may learn from my journey. Data, in the form of email, calendar notations, journal entries, grades, classroom observation summaries, and evaluation instruments, have been used to compose vignettes to evoke memories not only of the events of the year, but the feelings and emotions experienced. Data analysis is conducted through the lenses of Role Theory, Holland et al.'s work with Cultural Identities in Figured Worlds, and Imposter Syndrome. The theme of isolation is prevalent throughout; recommendations to alleviate isolation are made for HTLs themselves, as well as for those who manage and train HTLs. The roles of classroom teacher and academic coach did not conflict as I had initially assumed; rather, it was a difference in my understanding of the principal's role prescription which led me to make assumptions about my role and my performance. Further, my inability to see my role as a single figured world rather than a hybrid of the two separate worlds of classroom teaching and academic coaching, led to missed opportunities for success in all aspects of the role. In addition, my own high

expectations for my performance, particularly in the teaching portion of the role, led to feelings of inadequacy which are a hallmark of Imposter Syndrome. These results suggest principals and potential HTLs should take the opportunity to discuss the role in depth during the interview process and should keep the lines of communication open to avoid disconnects between role prescriptions. Those who train HTLs should provide opportunities for HTLs to build community with one another—despite differences in school sites—to help mitigate isolation and provide assistance for those who are struggling. Hybrid Teacher Leaders should also be aware of the symptoms and effects of Imposter Syndrome and should reach out for any tool or method to communicate concerns and alleviate the isolation, which can exacerbate the problem.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Vignette: A Moment's Reflection

*The blessed bell sounds the end of class for the day and my second English I class gushes through the door to join the flood of teenage humanity in the hallway. Holding back a sigh, I manage to murmur, "Have a great day," in a lackluster tone, knowing I should say something pleasant to send them on their way. It had been a difficult class; had I a dollar for every curse word my students produced that period, I would be well on my way to a healthy retirement fund. Two young men nearly fought; though the reasons for the quarrel were still unclear, I knew only that desks were shoved, voices were raised, and bystanders exhibited far more enthusiasm for the ensuing brawl than I had ever seen from them in my nearly two months of instruction. As I scanned my memory of the class, I could not isolate a single moment of true learning. The class period—and my instruction—had been a failure.*

*It was not my first class to be deemed thus, but there had been far too many of them recently. Even more disturbing to me was a glance at the calendar I had hung beside my desk to remind me of the upcoming academic coaching meetings I had scheduled. I need not have bothered to look today; I did not have an appointment scheduled. A little voice from way down deep whispered, "Your classes are the reason you don't have coaching appointments. They know you cannot control your kids. They know your students are not successful. Why would they want advice from you?"*

## Introduction

In my junior year of high school, my English teacher made an offhanded positive comment about a piece of writing about which I had been excited to write. It had the effect of sparking in me the idea of becoming an author. Like most people my age, I was more interested in Stephen King novels than the classics, but I knew from her comment I had the ability to be the kind of writer who could shape people's opinions. And so, I wanted to be an author.

Authors, however, need to pay the bills—and a writing career infrequently begins with a best seller. I needed a job to provide for my needs financially and medically, with potential for a comfortable retirement. I investigated the lives of many of the most popular authors and saw they taught classes to supplement their incomes. And so, I decided to be a teacher.

That seemingly flippant decision has shaped my life—sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse—since my declaration of major in 1993. What I did not know at the time is teaching, when done well, is a full-time—plus some—career which leaves little for anything else. Luckily for me, I grew to love it. Teaching challenged me in ways I could never have imagined, and as I grew in ability, I gained perspective on how there was so much more to be learned. As the years passed, my urge to be a bestselling author dimmed as my desire to be an excellent educator grew.

In 2003, I began teaching English in a high school in a major school district in Florida. The school was in one of the more rural areas of the district, had just under 2000 students, and had been open since 1973—which was a year after my birth. I was first hired to teach English 3 to a regular student population. In my second year, I earned the trust of my department head and was offered a spot teaching Advanced Placement English Language and Composition, a class which had not been an offering in the recent years—my first class had only six students. From

there I helped to build a program offering five full classes of 25+ AP Language students a year, in most years earning a 50% passing rate on the AP exam. I also taught honors English 3 classes, as well as advised the National Honor Society. As the years went on, I was given more responsibility and more leadership opportunities. I was offered the chance to help hire new employees by serving as a panel member on interviews; I served on curriculum planning teams during summer sessions; I wrote test questions for final exams; I became a teacher in-service trainer; I served as interim department head when our department head was out on parental leave. I was a valued member of the staff and others sought my counsel when needing advice. I had never longed to be an administrator, though the suggestion came up from those with whom I worked from time-to-time. However, after 10 years of teaching, a strong suggestion from my evaluator, and a glowing recommendation from my principal, I applied for and was hired to be an academic coach.

The academic coach position was fully-released from classroom teaching and provided on-the-spot professional development and support to teachers with less than six months of previous teaching experience. I would work at schools who had hired new teachers and would typically have multiple schools with which to work within a single year. In an ideal week, I would meet with each mentee twice a week, once to observe classroom practice, team teach, or model teach and once to provide academic coaching with data review, planning, and training. I also had a weekly training session (typically afternoons on Fridays) at which I grew my practice and shared my experiences with academic coaches who had been doing the job for a longer time. In the beginning, I was not sure I would like the position; in the end, I loved it more than teaching high school English. I loved working with new teachers and helping them on their journey, while providing professional development and support. I really loved when those with

whom I worked so closely became colleagues and friends; I am still in touch with many of my mentees to this day. In this way, I worked happily—and would have continued so, had the opportunity presented itself. However, due to grant funding which ended in 2016, the position was not a permanent one; at the end of my fourth year as an academic coach I was faced with a decision: return to my previous high school and resume my full-time teaching position, reapply for a position as an academic coach and hope to be accepted to the smaller and more streamlined cadre, or try something new. This dissertation grew from the new position to which I was hired.

## Statement of Problem

In the Fall Semester of 2016, I embarked on a new challenge in my career. Though I had been a successful academic coach over the previous four years, I was beginning a new role which combined academic coaching with classroom teaching for a suburban high school of just under 2000 students near a major Southeastern city. In my new role, I was told I would provide job-embedded professional development and academic coaching in a manner similar to my previous role, however the teachers I coached did not have to be new—in fact, they could be at any point in their teaching career. There was another fundamental difference between my new role and my last: while my previous role was fully-released from classroom teaching, the new role assigned me to academic coaching during the first three class periods in the morning, with an added classroom teaching assignment of three class periods during the remainder of the day. I had been in the school district for 14 years at that point, with 10 years teaching English in a nearby school, and 4 years as a fully-released academic coach. In addition, I had two previous years of teaching in another district, as well as three years as a training and development specialist for a major US corporation. My previous years' evaluations placed me at the effective

and highly effective levels in terms of my performance. Thanks to the roving nature of my previous role, traveling from school to school as new teachers began their careers, I had often been in the position of someone who was brand-new to a school and did not know the staff, the building, or the school's customs. At the beginning of my new role, I anticipated tensions typical to being at a new school and teaching new groups of students, but I believed I had the skills, the experience, and the fortitude to do well. I felt confident I would flourish at this new school and in this new opportunity, as it rested on two things with which I had already been deemed successful—namely, academic coaching and teaching English.

Although it did not occur to me at the time, much of my thoughts and fears about the new position came from the work I had done in both of my previous positions. I anticipated being comfortable with teaching; the lesson planning, grading, differentiation, meetings (IEP, PLC, ILT), data digs (from the teaching side), parent phone calls and conferences, and all the things which come as a part of conducting a class (gradual release of responsibility, monitoring for informal evaluation, reteaching as appropriate) were all things I had done before and would be comfortable doing again. In some ways, I even thought it might be easier to have only three classes of students, as there would be fewer items to grade, fewer calls to make, fewer students to get to know. I also anticipated being comfortable with the academic coaching; the coaching cycles, the conversations, the classroom observation, the data digs (from the instructional coaching side), the feedback, and the camaraderie. These were all things I had done before—they were my most recent experiences and the reason I took the new job in the first place. I had loved my previous position, and I was promised a similar experience with the new role for at least three periods a day. I even felt luckier than many of my fellow new hires; several had never done

instructional coaching before and did not have the level of training and experience I had in the role. While they were nervous about this new role, I was excited to get started.

I was not just living in a rose-colored reality, however. There were aspects to the upcoming year I understood would be a challenge. First, although I had been highly effective at teaching for many years in a row, my experience was in teaching Junior English and Advanced Placement classes; this time, I would be teaching two sections of Freshmen English and one of Sophomore English. Teachers new to a school, and teachers with high evaluation and Value-Added Measure scores (VAM scores come from student test scores modified by indicators of learning differences) often are assigned to classes with the most challenging students academically, as it is generally considered valuable for student performance to place the highest performing teachers with the lowest performing students. When I left teaching four years earlier, I had been evaluated as a "highly effective" teacher, which is the highest level of success on our scale; as such, my written evaluation scores (from observations of my teaching) and my Value-Added Measurements scores were both very good. Although I knew both curriculums well, I had never taught them and would need to put in additional planning time—both individually and with other teachers—to reach a similar level of success on VAM scores; as I was comfortable with both the Danielson rubric (the measurement tool for our written evaluation measurement) as both a teacher and as an academic coach (I trained my mentees on how to teach in ways which would be rated favorably on the rubric, including small group instruction, differentiation, and opportunities for student-led instruction), I anticipated no issues with the written evaluation portion of my work that year. I would also need to tailor the instruction to the various needs of the students, as the data indicated disparate reasons for their learning differences.

Next, I was at a new school. I had only visited the campus twice in the past; the first time, I was in a training session and did not make it out of the cafeteria; the second visit was when I was hired. In the beginning, just finding my way around and trying to remember names would be a challenge. This lack of knowledge also extended to my understanding of the culture of my school. As I had not been there in the past, I was not aware of the general attitudes toward classroom observation, instructional coaching, teacher evaluation, and professional-development. These were not at the top of my concerns as I began the year, however—and for what turns out to be a flaw in my thinking. In my previous experience as an academic coach, my new mentees did not know the culture of their schools either. As such, our work together set the tone for all the previously mentioned attitudes. I did not comprehend early in my work it would be necessary for me to find ways to reshape other's impressions and to set a new tone for the future.

My last concern was soon I would need to find a way to get teachers to invite me into their classrooms for coaching, as teachers would not be required to work with me if they did not care to do so. In my previous position, new teachers were given to me on a list at the beginning of the school year, with others added as they were hired throughout the year. Also in my previous position, my mentees were arranged for me; even if a mentee was not interested in working with me initially, the system was designed to require our work together and my unobtrusive and helpful presence—along with the overwhelming realities of teaching—usually won them over quickly. In my new position, I would need to go and seek those willing to participate; I knew there would be challenges, but I was eager to break through the barriers by extending a helpful hand and a positive attitude.

When the school year began, the tensions were familiar. As I had suspected, I needed to use a good amount of my planning time—as well as after school time—for the curriculum which

was new to me. I needed to coordinate with a teacher who shared the classroom with me (she was in the room the three periods I was coaching) in order not to take too much time in the room when she needed to be in there for her own purposes. During my coaching periods, I roamed the hallways getting the lay of the land, greeting people I passed, and trying to make myself seen. I hung out in teachers' planning areas, attempting to assist anyone who might need it, building up reserves of knowledge on the staff, the facilities, and the needs of the school. In that respect, the year began like many others. However, this phase usually lasted only the first couple of weeks of school; this period seemed to last a bit longer. Even though this was the case, I was not concerned, and I did not perceive a conflict with the two roles I occupied early in the year.

As the school year moved along however, I found myself struggling in areas I had not anticipated—in both the classroom and in the academic coaching portions of my role. Having been successful in the past, I was disheartened when I felt less than successful at either one of my roles. Though I had not previously suffered classroom management issues in my teaching experience, I was not as successful managing the behaviors of the students whom I had been assigned this year. I felt uncomfortable reaching out to the administration for help; people with my job description were viewed as experts in both teaching and academic coaching. I had been hired as an expert in my field, and yet I was experiencing the types of classroom management issues one would see in a first-year teacher. I worried calling the office would trigger regrets on the principal's part for offering me the position—I served at the pleasure of the principal, and I could easily be removed from the position if I did not perform well. I further worried calling the office would trigger a lack of trust on the faculty's part. The only person with whom I shared my situation was my former mentor, friend, and now my department head; she was supportive, but

she could do little but encourage me. She did not agree with my concerns about the administration or the staff; though she could empathize, she could do little to assuage my fears.

On the coaching side, few teachers took the opportunity to work with me. Many had suggestions of *others* who needed the help, but few saw those needs in themselves. As the coaching aspect was voluntary, I needed to find ways to be welcomed into the classroom. During schoolwide training sessions, teachers were polite and extended an open-door policy. However, when attempting to actually come into the classrooms I was told, "Not today. Maybe next week." I had not been able to build a repertoire of coaching opportunities, and as the weeks wore on, I had few appointments to fill my first three periods of the day.

As those periods went unfilled with coaching appointments, I often filled the time on my own with additional planning. While this afforded me the opportunity to provide engaging lessons and quick feedback, it did not help me to get into classrooms. I was dejected each day as I looked at my coaching calendar only to see empty spaces there. My English teacher colleagues also began talking; the more they saw me sitting at my planning desk during my coaching time, the more they grumbled about my position. They were angry I got extra time to myself for planning and was not helping where they believed I was needed.

At the end of September, I was out for bereavement leave. While I was gone only a week, my classroom fell into disarray. Students who had previously been coming into some form of control were now as mismanaged as they were in the first few days of the year. Though I had been told I would not need to be concerned about lesson planning during my bereavement, it appeared no one else was concerned about the task either—the students were asked to do next to nothing during the time I was away. So not only was I at my lowest emotionally, but I needed to

battle my students to regain control and get them working again. It was a challenge I was not sure I was up to meeting.

To make matters worse, Florida Standards Assessment retakes began immediately after I returned. Since I had the first three periods of my schedule without students, the administration assigned me to a room to proctor the exams. Day after day for two weeks, I came to school hoping for time to begin coaching teachers only to find I was, again, proctoring exams. Though this did not continue every week after the two weeks of retakes, it did happen frequently enough that it broke into whatever momentum I might have tried to establish and made it impossible to set up coaching cycles, which required multiple classroom or planning visits.

In October, I began noticing a connection between my two roles. When I had a successful coaching session in the morning, I felt as if I was invincible as I entered the classroom. As a result, my teaching seemed to go more successfully. When my teaching went well in the afternoon, I felt a burst of energy to attempt to reach out for more coaching opportunities. But the inverse was also true. When I did not have a coaching opportunity, or when a teacher cancelled, or when I was made to cancel on a teacher to proctor an exam, I carried the negativity into my classroom teaching. When my students demonstrated a lack of success, or when their behavior was particularly out of control, I took the morose feeling into my coaching the next morning. It seemed to me the success—or failure—of each role rested on the success or failure of the other.

I wondered if any of my fellow academic coach/teacher colleagues who were at other schools felt as I did; I wondered if other teachers who had roles which involved both teaching and coaching experienced similar feelings; I wondered further if there were ways to have anticipated and prepared for those early experiences prior to beginning the job.

Because this was a grant-funded program, we met together monthly in morning and afternoon sessions (those who had morning academic coaching periods met in the morning and then went back to their worksites to teach; those who had afternoon academic coaching periods began teaching at their worksites in the morning and then ended their day at the meeting). In these sessions, we received training which was supposed to help us do our jobs better. The sessions were highly structured; in the beginning I thought the meetings needed to be so structured because there was so much information to get through in just a little time. However, the structure never changed. As the months wore on, fewer and fewer of us showed up to the meetings, despite their mandatory nature. I wanted to speak to the ones who were there to see if they were experiencing the same tensions I was feeling; the structure of the meetings prevented much free discussion. Likewise, I wanted to also speak with the ones who were not at the meetings; I wondered if they were experiencing the same tensions and had found the training provided in the meetings to be unsatisfactory in alleviating those tensions—much as I did. Later, I cynically wondered if the structure—which may at first have been set with the best of intentions to be conscious stewards of our limited time—was now imposed to keep us from talking to one another. Dissent breeds dissent, and the diminishing numbers spoke dissent.

Throughout the first year in my dual role, I kept a journal. Some days had more detailed entries than others, but I was able to document the events and feelings of most of my days. When reflecting upon the year during my post-planning and summertime, I had to deem the year a failure. I had met with only a handful of teachers during the year, and only two ever got to the point of having a full coaching cycle (pre-planning discussion, classroom observation, analysis of student work, reflection, and planning for future instruction). Much of my calendar revealed the amount of time I spent proctoring exams; the administrators saw my three periods without

students as a convenient way to staff their exams without taking teachers from the classroom and interrupting instruction. My students had the lowest semester exam scores of the first-year class, and many of my students failed each semester. At some point in the year, I had gotten past my fear of calling the administration for student misconduct; I had no longer cared if it was a reflection on my teaching or a warning to others about my ability to coach, and I had one of the highest rates of discipline referral of my department. And I was no closer to understanding if any of this was normal; I had only had infrequent, short, and moderated conversations with others in my position—certainly not enough to draw any conclusions. It was then I moved to looking at the research.

Quickly, however, I found another snag. Though research has been published about the existing tensions for teacher leaders who return to the classroom full-time, research still needs to be done on hybrid roles (ones which involve both coaching and classroom teaching roles) and the ways in which the tensions of transitioning to those roles can be mitigated by both the hybrid teacher and their administrative staff.

## Purpose

While very few districts have a grant-funded cadre of academic coaches who are also assigned to classroom teaching, most do have positions which involve classroom teaching for part of the day and academic coaching, curriculum planning, department chair, or professional development responsibilities for the remainder of the day. Coined Hybrid Teacher Leaders (HTLs) by Margolis and Huggins (2012), these positions are becoming ubiquitous throughout the United States as districts strive to balance budgetary concerns with the need to provide teacher support and site-based or job-embedded professional development. Some teachers come

to these positions because of a longing to have more responsibility and to have a greater impact on teacher performance and student achievement; Elizabeth Munroe (2013, 2014) found those taking on greater responsibility reported higher job satisfaction. Others are previously fully released academic coaches, department chairs, curriculum planners, and the like who are assigned classroom responsibilities for part of the day. In the current world of budgetary concerns and COVID-19, fully-released academic coaches are being asked more frequently to take on teaching responsibilities to save their positions; while FTE dollars come in for classroom teachers and teaching positions are somewhat protected, academic coaching positions are often the first to be cut when the budget is a concern. While some academic coaches relish the opportunity to lead classes of students, others enjoy their role as a mentor to adult learners and wonder in what ways their being tied to a classroom for even part of the day will affect their work. Elizabeth Munroe (2014) also found the reasons for a teacher leader's return to the classroom affected the success of the transition. It had certainly been the case in my transition. I had loved my previous role and would have been happy to remain in it for many more years to come; the ending of a grant and the restructuring of the role left me with little alternative but to find another role which would balance my talents and offer me the opportunity to continue—at least in part—the role with which I felt the happiest. But Munroe's (2014) observations resonate with me; I was unhappy making the transition back to classroom teaching, even if it was for only part of the day. I had to question whether my unhappiness had an impact on the lack of success—and my perceptions leading to this assessment of a lack of success—I experienced in this first year.

Though HTLs may teach any subject at their schools, often these positions are a hybrid between literacy (reading and writing) coach and Language Arts teacher. Other hybrids which

exist throughout my county and in my own school are that of Reading Coach and reading teacher, Reading Coach and Department Head or Lead Teacher, Writing Coach and Department Head or Lead Teacher, as well as Curriculum Coach and Language Arts teacher (just to name a few). In all three of these cases, the HTLs work with the entire staff, as well as with their own departments, to provide teachers with support, observation, and feedback as well as lesson ideas, strategies, and training. Additionally, these HTLs are frequently requested to facilitate and deliver standardized testing throughout the school year (one I know is acting as the testing coordinator until the position can be filled). While the breadth of duties assigned to a Literacy Coach, Reading Coach, and Curriculum Coach would easily fill a full-day schedule, schools are frequently hybridizing these positions with classroom teaching and thus adding the planning, instruction, and grading for multiple classes to their already busy schedules. With the emergence of COVID-19, effects on staffing are having an impact on the already hybridized positions of HTLs, as many are being asked to either teach classes for the semester, substitute for teachers who are quarantined due to exposure to the virus, or take on the responsibility of creating the lesson plans and doing the grading for positions which have been cut due to dwindling student attendance and its broader impact on funding. While health concerns loom large in these situations, as HTLs scurry from room-to-room checking on substitute teachers and filling in for missing teachers, another concern comes into focus: If HTLs are spending their time teaching, planning, and grading for missing faculty, when are they able to do the coaching and mentoring which are so necessary for teachers in crisis? Alone, that question is an excellent topic for future study. However, the question ties into my own in that it is yet another example of HTL job responsibilities being modified on the fly when times are tough. In my situation, test proctoring

was the *cause du jour*, but the outbreak of COVID-19 demonstrates HTLs are often a stopgap measure for staffing when times get tough.

With the sheer number of HTL positions in language arts and reading, the impact on these individuals and their successful delivery of high-quality instruction as well as meaningful academic coaching and feedback cannot be overstated. There are implications for teacher development and student achievement in language arts, as main sources of support and training— the reading coach and writing coach, as well as the department head or teacher lead—have added responsibilities and limited time to act in the literacy coach role. Administrative members, including principals and assistant principals, may have a hand in shaping the ways in which the hybrid role will look and feel in their schools. As a result, this study also has implications for educational leadership. In addition, there is evidence preservice teachers predict their entry into hybrid roles—either through athletic coaching or through later academic coaching or department chair positions. As a result, there are implications for teacher retention as preservice teachers determine the desirability of hybrid roles based on the way those roles work in their schools.

## Research Questions

This study examines the Hybrid Teacher Leader role from an insider's perspective—my own. As little has been published pertaining to the feelings experienced by those in a hybridized role of teacher leader and classroom teacher and as there are others still in hybrid roles—or about to begin one—my journey provides an opportunity for some much needed catharsis and adds to the body of knowledge on this topic for those who seek to understand an experience of being a

Hybrid Teacher Leader. As I embark on this journey of self-discovery, I am exploring these *a priori* questions:

- As I reflect on the events and emotions of my work as an HTL in a high school and write my autoethnography, in what ways might I discover more about myself as a classroom teacher, a teacher leader, and a Hybrid Teacher Leader?
- How might my awareness of these discoveries assist me in my future work?
- How might my discoveries assist others in Hybrid Teacher Leader roles?
- In what ways might my discoveries inform the role expectations of those who manage Hybrid Teacher Leaders, or of the HTLs themselves?

## Researcher as Instrument

An autoethnography is a qualitative method of research in which the researcher is the subject of the research and the narrator of the research. One could say it is a dual role, which is quite in keeping with my field of study. Humor aside, readers will note this writing is in first person and has come from my own lived experiences. Although this journey was conceived in 2017, the destination of the journey was not discovered until recently; the destination was only clear once I used writing and reflection to explore my personal experiences of being an HTL and find ways to connect them to the wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings which inform the role of an educator. I tend to be a bit of a packrat, keeping email, old calendars/planners, and my journals. All of these are saved as something born of a desire to both keep myself on track and make sure I remember things as they really are instead of an idealized or over-dramatized form incidents might take on over time, and its these tools which have helped me to resurrect and analyze the events of my past HTL experiences.

Autoethnography is unique in that it combines cultural analysis and interpretation with the use of narrative writing (Chang, 2008). However, as Chang also notes, rather than being mere storytelling, autoethnography aligns with anthropological and social scientific inquiry by reflecting, analyzing, and interpreting the stories in their broader sociocultural context (2008). I am the ethnographer and the culture I am studying is myself in a role I have played as part of a broader cultural context; in autoethnography, the self is the ethnographer self (Ellis and Bochner, 2000).

## Organization of Dissertation

At the beginning of each chapter, I share a vignette composed of a memory of an experience in my dual role. Vignettes are described by Erickson (1986) as "vivid portrayal[s] of the conduct of an event of everyday life" (p. 149) to enhance the "contextual richness" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 83). The vignettes reveal an unprocessed event in time, as Erickson (1986) suggested "based on fieldnotes taken as the events happened" (p. 150). Such events come to mind as I read the diary entries written during my first year in the HTL role, attempt to process my purpose in writing this work, which fields of study I will use as a lens to analyze those events, and the reason autoethnography is the methodology I have chosen for my study. While they are a nod to the storyteller rather than the ethnographer, I hope readers will see in them the spark of inspiration leading to the work which follows each and indulge me in my reminiscence. As Ellis (1998) put it, it is my hope "these vignettes, even without their larger contexts, have moved listeners…to sense some of the evocative power, embodiment, and understanding of life that comes through the concrete details of autoethnographic narrative" (p. 4).

Chapter one of this autoethnography is an overview of how I began my journey in a dual role. Here, I name autoethnography as my research methodology, as well as share my purpose and initial research questions.

Chapter two is the literature review. I begin with a definition of Hybrid Teacher Leadership (Margolis, 2012) and the ways in which that definition applies to the role I occupied over a two-year timespan. I also discuss how Hybrid Teacher Leadership has become synonymous with the roles of reading coach, writing coach, and academic coach, as more coaches are tasked with not only their duties as coaches, but with those of classroom teacher as well. I then built a framework of reference to use as a lens to reflect upon the role of the Hybrid Teacher Leader. My hope is for Hybrid Teacher Leaders, as well as their leadership teams, to draw on my lived experiences and be able to use this lens to reflect upon their own experiences as well.

Chapter three is the section in which I describe my theoretical framework and the methodology of autoethnography in greater detail. First, the theories of Role Theory, Cultural Identities in Figured Worlds, and Imposter Syndrome are defined and explained. Next, I discuss autoethnography as a qualitative method which offers the author an opportunity to write in a style which is highly personalized, and which draws from the author's lived experiences to understand a societal phenomenon (Wall, 2006). This methodology is explained in depth, along with its limitations and benefits.

Chapter four is my story, my autoethnography told using vignettes, email sent and received during that time, calendar notations, and recollections of my experiences during the time leading up to being hired in the HTL role and the first full year in the position. Far from being a dry recollection of events, I have made the effort to share my feelings and emotions as

well. Following my story, I share my findings from the analysis using three different theoretical lenses which undergird my inquiry.

Chapter five is where I share my conclusions, to learn from my mistakes, and to suggest ways in which those mistakes might be avoided in the future. From these conclusions, I share implications for those who intend to attempt an HTL role, those who will manage HTLs, and those who will train HTLs. From this, I also find avenues for further research, which are discussed as well.

# CHAPTER TWO

## Vignette: A Moment of Elation

*Stepping away from Ms. O.'s room, I'm riding a wave of exhilaration. I had entered the room 50 minutes beforehand feeling battered and battle-worn. My classes, mostly freshmen with one sophomore group, had been difficult as of late; the end of the term was coming up and the inertia of the term was now giving way to the panic induced by the realization that time was running out. Students begged to turn in work they did not do earlier in the term, scrambling to put anything on the paper that might get them the extra points they needed not to fail—a scramble that often-included cheating, for which I needed to be extra vigilant. It was all so exhausting. But now, exiting Ms. O.'s room, my tiredness and frustration has been replaced by a sense of euphoria; during our 50-minute session, Ms. O. had learned a new way of assessing her students and had found that her students needed more specific directions to complete the task based on the standards. For her own part, Ms. O. was grateful, happy that the 50 minutes had been productive, reporting that she had a better handle on the reasons for grading and how she could assess the standards going forward. For my part, I had what I coveted most—a follow-up appointment. My spirit renewed, I moved toward my classroom in anticipation of the bell sounding for my first classroom teaching assignment of the day. It crossed my mind as I entered my classroom door: This was going to be a great day.*

## Literature Review

It is a law of physics that two forms of matter cannot occupy the same space at the exact same time. And yet, the trend in teacher leadership has moved to hybridizing the teacher leader's role to include the complicated and sometimes conflicting responsibilities of a classroom teacher. Though there has been a great deal of study to suggest the hybridizing has both its attractions and detractions, little is known about the perceived impact of this strategy on literacy coaches and the work they perform. This is a crucial point in my specific case. As an academic coach and teacher in a hybridized role, I have seen and felt the impact firsthand and can add to the body of knowledge on this rapidly growing trend in education.

### Defining Hybrid Teacher Leadership

Though dual roles in education are not a new concept, the specific study of the ways in which dual roles impact the individuals in those positions—and specifically in English education—is a relatively new area of study. For the purposes of this paper, a dual role is referenced as a Hybrid Teacher Leader (HTL) as coined by Margolis (2012). Margolis' defined the role as one who is both a teacher leader (i.e., department head, literacy coach, reading specialist, writing resource) and who also has the responsibility of direct classroom teaching of students. Some of these types of dual roles are unique, and as such there are few studies which mention HTLs directly—Margolis (2012), Cantrell et al. (2015), and Snyder (2016). But there are additional studies of teacher leaders as an individual component which may serve to illuminate that specific element of the position. For the purposes of this study, I have used the terms teacher leader, academic coach, and literacy coach synonymously; despite their initial differences, the hybridization of their roles has made them similar enough to use

interchangeably. In addition, all three are often hybridized with a literacy teaching position (language arts, reading, writing) and thus have those similarities as well. When a person with any of these job titles has their duties combined with the role of classroom teacher, they become an HTL and therefore may find relevance and relatability in this study.

It must be noted, at the time I began my position as an HTL I did not have this definition of the role in mind. In fact, I saw the two sides of the role to be two vastly different parts—the classroom teacher side and the academic coach side did not blend in my original thoughts. When in the classroom teaching mode, I would be teaching English to teenagers; when in the academic coaching mode, I would be coaching teachers toward better instruction and student performance. Other than having relevant examples of recent teaching—along with the possibility of having shared student populations—I did not perceive a major connection between the two parts of the role.

## Examination of a Single Role: Teacher Leaders

Much previous study has been conducted on the effectiveness of teachers working together to improve teaching practice, and the role of teacher leaders in the capacity of academic coach has been examined by many (Moller, Childs-Bowen, & Scrivner, 2001; Danielson, 2007; Fullen, 1994; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Murphy, 2005; Wasley, 1991; York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Barnett, 2013; Berry, Daughtrey, & Wieder, 2010; Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2009; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Murphy, 2005; Nelson, Deuel, Slavit, & Kennedy, 2010; Schmoker, 2005). Many scholars have noted the positive effects teacher leadership can have on schools. In fact, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) asserted, "Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related

factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (p. 5). Frost and Durrant (2003), posit teacher leadership is less about a job title or formal role and more about being a change agent and stepping up to more responsibility within the school building, “achieved not through a rational restructuring from above, rather…from her own initiative” (p. 178). When a job title is assigned from above, the titles are many and varied. “Within the literature, teacher leaders have been given titles such as coordinator, coach, specialist, lead teacher, department chair, and mentor teacher, just to name a few (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p. 137; Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008; Neumerski, 2012). The role definition of a teacher leader differs greatly as well but seems to converge on two premises: teacher leaders answer to administration but are not administrators themselves and teacher leaders focus on collaboration with teachers to improve student performance (Jackson et al., 2010). Without the powers of administration, a teacher leader must leverage relationships by “being respected by their peers, being continuous learners, being approachable, and using group skills and influence to improve the instructional practice of their peers” (Educational Testing Service, 2012, p. 11). Though the role titles are as varied as the individual responsibilities assigned by the administration at the schools at which the leaders have been employed, there are standards created to guide and shaped the discussions around the role of a teacher leader. Created in 2012 by the Leadership Exploratory Consortium, *The Teacher Leader Model Standards* describe the seven domains or attributes of a teacher leader:

- Domain I: Fostering a collaborative culture to support educator development and student learning
- Domain II: Accessing and using research to improve practice and student learning
- Domain III: Promoting professional learning for continuous improvement
- Domain IV: Facilitating improvements in instruction and student learning
- Domain V: Promoting the use of assessments and data for school and district improvement
- Domain VI: Improving outreach and collaboration with families and community

- Domain VII: Advocating for student learning and the profession

(Educational Testing Service, 2012, p. 9)

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) indicate the potential of teacher leadership within every school setting, but Educational Testing Service (2012) cautions there must be the prerequisite change of culture in the school from one of teachers teaching in isolation to one which is more collaborative, and teamwork focused. Administration, therefore, must set the stage for teacher leadership roles by articulating schoolwide goals; this articulation, however, may necessitate the retraining of principals to understand the role of teacher leaders and how best to support the role within their own schools.

It is worthwhile to note, all the domains listed above relate to the teacher leader as one who works with the adults in the school building; none of the domains relate to direct classroom teaching on the part of the teacher leader. The role, with its related benefits, was originally conceived as a stand-alone position without the combination with classroom teaching. While in my previous position of academic coaching (which was fully-released from classroom teaching), we were often reminded of the phrase from philosopher Lao Tzu, "Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach a man to fish and he will eat for a lifetime." I experienced many instances of frustration in my previous position when a new teacher just simply did not seem to be "getting it;" it often felt easier to do it for her and hope she would catch on. The quote brought me back to the reality of my position: We teach the teachers. If we do it for them too much, without releasing responsibility to them, they will not learn. In the original view of teacher leadership, the time would be better spent teaching the teachers so they could teach many classes well into the future, rather than having the more experienced teacher leaders take on a classroom teaching role giving the benefit of their experience to only a few groups of students.

Regardless, the role of a teacher leader may contribute to both job-embedded professional development (Croft et al., 2010) and have a positive impact on school improvement (Muijs & Harris, 2003). For instance, the teacher leader role of literacy coach (or reading/writing coach) is one which came as result of *No Child Left Behind* for Title I schools and schools which were struggling. As it became clear from testing (such as FCAT) students were not performing to standards, the position of literacy coach was created to impact student performance indirectly through the coaching of classroom teachers on strategies they could implement with their students back in the classroom. As a result, literacy coaches were first envisioned not to work with students directly, but instead to be available to coach teachers throughout the school day (Elish-Piper & L'Allier, 2011). As the tie to student performance is seen indirectly, there has been little direct evidence of the success of literacy coaches. However, in a 2010 study, Lockwood et al. found teachers who participate in coaching use a greater number of strategies in their teaching. The assumption here is a greater number of strategies will improve teaching and will lead to better student performance. In a 2011 study, Elish-Piper and L'Allier found the students of teachers who participated in coaching with the reading coach made positive gains in reading achievement tests. While both previously mentioned studies tend to indicate the value of coaching on student achievement, the issue, according to Elish-Piper and L'Allier (2011) with the assumption of teacher performance as a way of determining the success of literacy coaches is twofold. First, teachers have autonomy in their classrooms. Although the teachers may have been coached, they may not go on to implement the strategies in the classroom or may not implement them with fidelity to the spirit of the task. Lackluster implementation, lack of implementation, or alternate strategies implementation can all lead to skewed reading achievement scores—which may work in favor of or against the literacy coach. Another issue is the sheer number of

initiatives rolled out at a single time. In some schools, changes in curriculum, student class scheduling, and teacher coaching are all made at the same time. As such, it would be impossible to assign the credit—or the blame—for student achievement to a single factor of said implementation. So, while anecdotally literacy coaches have contributed to improvement in schools or overall school data, there is little direct evidence of a literacy coach's value to student achievement (an overall way of expressing the number of students making grade-level gains), or specific gains made by individual students (a way of understanding the gains made by those students whose scores still reside below grade level). This distinction is important when attempting to maintain funding for coaching positions, as the inability to directly tie literacy coaching for teachers to specific learning gains made by students can lead to losses for academic coaching as a whole or to the loss of specific academic coaching units on a school-by-school basis. It is also the impetus, often, for hybridizing the roles in the first place; the teacher leader ascended to the position because of years of effective classroom teaching, and it is that known quantity which leads to the decision to tie them to direct classroom instruction as often as possible. But to what result?

## Teacher Leaders Returning to Full-Time Classroom Teaching

Because the role of a teacher leader is not without its monetary costs, school districts nationwide have had to consider alternatives to fully-released teacher leader positions—sometimes doing away with them altogether and returning the teacher leader to the classroom full time. Steinbacher-Reed and Powers (2011) have reported teacher leaders who returned to classroom teaching because of budget cuts experienced "a variety of emotions, ranging from excitement at the thought of returning to the classroom to sadness or resentment about losing the

identity of coach" (p. 69). Elizabeth Munroe (2013) examined one instructional leader's return to classroom teaching. Though her return to the classroom after four years of teacher leadership was voluntary, the participant wished to provide an informal leadership role at her school (p. 90). In this case study, Munroe identified six tensions related to the return of a teacher leader to full-time classroom teacher responsibilities: "role definition, acknowledgement and recognition, little time for leadership, brief professional conversations, self-imposed expectations, and loneliness in her unique position" (pp. 95-99). While the shift from teacher leader to full-time teacher can take place at the same school with the same staff with which the teacher leader is familiar, there are times when the loss of the funding unit, combined with the unavailability of an instructional funding unit in English or reading, results in the need for the now full-time teacher to seek employment at a different school.

In a 2014 study, Munroe examined the return of two teacher leaders to the role of classroom teachers. This time, the participants both voluntarily returned to the classroom only to find quite different results. While one returned to the same school and the same classroom she had left only two years before and went on to experience overwhelming success with the transition, the other took a position at a new school and found typical stresses of the transition were multiplied by the unfamiliarity of the school's culture and staff. "The more elements of change the newcomer faces, the more adjustments and sensemaking is required of the individual" (Grodzki, 2011, p. 22). While the familiarity with the school led one participant to enhanced opportunities for exercising some of her leadership skills, the other participant's lack of familiarity with the school—as well as her low name and skill recognition on the part of the staff—led her to only be associated with her classroom teaching role, which was a source of frustration for her. According to Munroe (2014), though they began with similar aspirations and

levels of hopefulness and excitement for their new position, the "two major differences lie in (a) the definition of their teacher leader role and (b) their familiarity with the school to which they returned" (p. 18). In my situation, the district's move to save money and place qualified teachers in front of students resulted in the elimination of my fully-released academic coaching position. As a result, I took a hybridized position at a school at which I had previously never been assigned. Reading Munroe's study, I could not help but identify with the teacher who experienced increased frustration in a new school, with diminished coaching opportunities based on the staff's lack of experience with her coaching persona. And yet there was something missing from that study, something not shared. What I experienced was so far beyond frustration, I was still left wondering if the participant in Munroe's study felt it, too. Munroe's study left me wanting more.

To this point, the research has tended to favor the scenario of teacher leaders voluntarily and happily returning to the classroom. However, the urgency with which some districts move teacher leaders to classroom teaching positions results in the inevitable: not all teacher leaders will want to leave their roles as teacher leaders and return exclusively to classroom teaching. In 2014, Elizabeth Munroe described the goal of "climbing the ladder" (p. 2); while moving forward in the prestige and responsibility of a teacher leadership position is considered a good thing, *going back* to the classroom is seen as a bad thing, a negative move on the ladder to success (p. 2). Munroe notes, "For some of these teacher leaders, their return to the classroom was involuntary and, yes, their return seemed somewhat like sliding down a snake" (2014, p. 2). It can be inferred a teacher's attitude toward her return to the classroom could shape her perceptions of the role and her efficacy in that role. I had loved my previous fully-released teacher leader role, and my return to the classroom was done so begrudgingly. In May, when I

was hired for the coming school year, returning to the classroom did, indeed, feel like a step backward. But by the time August had arrived, I had gone into the year with a sense of newness and change. I was looking forward to teaching again, and I thought I understood my mission as far as the academic coaching aspect of my position entailed. And yet just a few months later, I entered the office of my department head weeping. My sense of efficacy was exceptionally low in all aspects of my position. I felt like a failure. Munroe's study, though helpful, did not speak directly to my situation.

### Classroom Teachers with Unofficial Leadership Opportunities

The research from both Steinbacher-Reed and Powers (2011) and Munroe (2013, 2014) seem to support an increased sense of satisfaction among teachers who took on some leadership opportunities beyond their classroom teaching roles, such as providing professional development at faculty meetings or serving as a buddy or mentor to new teachers at the school (p. 69). However, Munroe (2014) also points out one of the participants whose case she studied "experienced some tension related to being simultaneously a teacher and a leader" (p. 19). Munroe's philosophy of Role Theory (Schmidt, 2000) leads her to assess this added stress to be because of the conflicting roles, "…because the usual norm in the culture of teaching is for teachers to be teachers and leaders to be leaders" (Munroe, 2014, p. 19; Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008; Mangin & Stoelinga, 2011). Munroe, however, sums up the participant's experiences as being positive—despite the tensions—in that she, "...had a defined teacher leader role, her school knew and drew upon her past leadership work, and she had time for leadership work and professional conversations" (Munroe, 2014, p. 19). My position did indeed offer me the types of opportunities Steinbacher-Reed and Powers (2011) and Munroe (2013, 2014) mentioned. During

the pre-planning time before the school year officially began, I was presenting in front of the faculty at a meeting and providing leadership in a discussion group at a training session. I was planning faculty professional development and pouring over data from the previous school year to make recommendations about the upcoming year. Although there was a bit more added stress, each of those activities were extremely satisfying. However, in only a few short weeks, the dual role became fixed on the more dominant role—that of the classroom teacher. This is where Steinbacher-Reed and Powers—as well as Munroe's—research failed to reflect my reality. Neither study mentioned the ways in which the positive and negative aspects of both positions interacted with one another and the ways in which success or failure in one, inevitably altered the way I felt about the other.

## Dual Role: Teacher Leader Responsibilities

While some districts favor moving teacher leaders into full-time teaching, other districts have been experimenting with the idea of creating a new position which is a dual role of teacher leader and classroom teacher. Perhaps this is one of the reasons teacher leader positions like literacy coaches are being hybridized in schools. As literacy coaches are expected to have been successful classroom teachers themselves before being elevated to their present position, it may seem a common sense move to put those individuals back in front of students to help impact student achievement.

However, on its own, the role of literacy coach can be daunting. In addition to one-on-one coaching with teachers, literacy coaches can provide professional development, classroom support, modeling of strategies, informal observations of classrooms (learning walks), lead focus groups, run book studies, aid in the selection of curriculum, and produce materials related to

strategies being shared. In addition, literacy coaches gather data from multiple assessments, interpret the findings, and prepare documents and presentations to share what the data has to offer. As they are the experts of the data, literacy coaches are asked to participate in numerous meetings, committees, trainings, and conferences. Lastly, because the literacy coach's time is seen as being more flexible, they are assigned the responsibility for scheduling reading assessments, reserving testing locations, arranging for the care and maintenance of testing computers, and serving as a supervisor during actual testing time. Swanson et al.'s (2011) book outlined "ten critical issues for teacher leaders" and offered an understanding of the tensions related to the coaching aspect of the role. Swanson's 10 critical issues are:

1. Building support among administrators
2. Defining roles and responsibilities, and straddling roles
3. Dealing with resistance
4. Developing expertise
5. Building and supporting growth in others
6. Coping with isolation
7. Establishing and maintaining credibility
8. Learning the politics
9. Advocating for others and their causes
10. Handling the workload

(Swanson, 2011, pp. 2-23)

While Swanson's study focused on teacher leaders as a separate and distinct role, study has not been done on the impact of the teacher leader role—with all ten of those tensions—when combined with the rigors of planning, teaching, grading, and conferring as a classroom teacher as

well. My work sheds light on the tensions specific to the hybridization of the teacher leadership and classroom teacher roles.

## Teacher Leader as Classroom Teacher: Model Classroom

When the teacher leader position is hybridized to add classroom teaching to the number of responsibilities, even more tensions are bound to ensue. When looking at the classroom teaching aspect of HTLs, Margolis and Doring (2012) found HTLs perform in much the same way as non-HTL teachers. For instance, in their study of HTL-led studio classrooms Margolis and Doring found HTLs did not wish to be observed during their teaching, even though modeling has been found to the be the most beneficial way to communicate strategies to teachers (Margolis and Doring, 2012). A big part of the reason was due to fear…what if the lesson did not go well? As opposed to looking at the difficulty as a means to reach deep discussion and reflection, the HTLs felt as if they would be damaging their credibility by performing in a less than perfect manner. Instead of engaging in rich discussion about their performance in the classroom, Margolis and Doring (2012) found HTLs tended to make the same excuses for the poor performance, including blaming the students for being placed in the class inappropriately (i.e., being placed in honors level English instead of regular level English) or being lazy. They also evidenced the same shame found in non-HTLs at having a class implementation of strategies which did not go well. The takeaway here is HTLs are subject to the same issues in the classroom as non-HTL teachers; the significant difference is the role HTLs play as coaches. When the classroom and the coaching combine, HTLs have not only their teaching ego to protect, but their coaching efficacy—or perceived effectiveness by those they would seek to lead—as well (Cantrell et al., 2015).

## Hybrid Teacher Leader Self-Efficacy

Efficacy in the implementation of the HTL role was studied by Cantrell et al. (2015). In their study, they attempted to explain how a coach's efficacy can be impacted by the experiences they have in the role. Drawing on Bandura's (1993, 1997) study of how the physiological and the emotional impact teacher performance, Cantrell et al. (2015) found HTL efficacy could be affected by what happens both in the coaching portion of their position and in the classroom portion as well. In what Banderas calls mastery experiences, efficacy is initiated and solidified; the more mastery experiences, the more likely the person will be to feel self-efficacy in the role. This means the opposite is true as well, and a teacher's efficacy can be harmed by a lack of mastery experiences. Cantrell et al. (2015) found the HTLs new to the position tended to have positive mastery experiences in the classroom—as that was the most recent and complete experience they had. However, there were elements of the HTL role which made it difficult to have as many mastery experiences in the coaching aspect of the role—because they had been academic coaches for far less time than they had been teaching, thus affecting self-efficacy with the academic coaching portion of the role. In my situation, however, my most recent and comfortable experience was with the academic coaching. My self-efficacy in the teaching role was shaken due to curriculum changes and student behavioral concerns which were new to my experience—so the classroom teaching portion of my role was not comfortable for me. Cantrell et al. (2015) did not particularly speak to the reverse situation—in the study, the classroom was a place of solace, as the rules were well-defined and there was a wealth of experience on which to draw. My own contributions provide evidence of an individual in an HTL role experiencing shaken confidence in the teaching portion of the role, which then leads to uncertainty and a lack of confidence in the academic coaching portion of the role.

In her mixed methods case study dissertation, Rebecca Snyder (2016) looked at HTL feelings of efficacy and the ways those feelings were associated with the dual role of the position. By the end of the first year, Snyder (2016) found the HTL's self-efficacy remained strong in both the coaching and the teaching elements; in other words, the HTLs believed they were good coaches and good teachers. However, the dual role did pose some difficulties for them. As the HTL position was a new one, the role was loosely defined. As such, some schools implemented their HTLs in one way, while others assigned different duties. This led to confusion about how to document their time and how to best use the time they had. In addition, the HTLs tended to put more emphasis on the teaching element of their dual role position. These HTLs indicated they saw the students daily and needed to provide fresh lessons and ongoing feedback. As a result, some of them used some of their coaching time for the purposes of planning, grading, and conferencing for their own classes. Lastly, Snyder (2016) found negotiating the roles of "coworker, peripheral leader, and initiator" (pp. 156-157) were problematic for HTLs. In essence, they needed be able to navigate three different modes within the same day, and most found the task to be daunting. In my own experience, I see Snyder's (2016) study playing out in my use of coaching time for planning and grading purposes. While Snyder's (2016) participants seemed to make that shift based on the need they saw with their students and their classroom responsibilities, this is where my own experience differs. With those differences in mind, my experiences add to the body of knowledge on how I as an HTL experienced the opportunities and duties afforded to me by my position, and how those factors affected my efficacy in the eyes of my colleagues, as well as my own sense of self-efficacy.

## Unexplored Territory: Human Impact and Self-Efficacy for HTLs

Though HTL positions of department head or coach have been hybridized for years, the type of HTL which combines academic coaching with classroom teaching are a more recent development. As such, there have been few studies which outline directly what the tensions are for HTL roles, and how the interplay between the roles leads to additional tensions not yet explored. Previous authors call upon research from the single role of instructional coaching to examine the tensions, as the tensions which previously existed for coaches did not go away once the classroom responsibilities were added. However, to date, no study has examined the ways in which the HTLs feelings of self-efficacy in one role can impact the feelings of efficacy in the other role, leading to additional tensions.

If the possibility of a leadership role interwoven with the return to the classroom could indeed lead to greater satisfaction and self-efficacy, one notable school district in the southeastern United States appears to be on the cusp of an innovative way to combine the two roles. Beginning in the 2016-2017 school year, the district began to hire for a new position which would combine both teacher leader and classroom teacher into a single entity. The position, titled Teacher Talent Developer or TTD, allowed for three of six periods to be dedicated each day to job-embedded professional development, with the remaining three periods reserved for classroom teaching. Though not every school would have the opportunity to have a TTD on staff, the 50 pilot schools would have the opportunity to shape the program and the ways in which the teachers—as well as the public—viewed the dual role (Sokol, 2016). To provide teacher leadership while still generating FTE (Full Time Equivalent) dollars—as well as ensure the most successful teachers are in the classroom—most academic coaches have been required to

teach three of their six class periods, while still maintaining teacher leadership responsibilities for the remaining three.

Going a step further, leaders of this same district hired Gibson Consulting Group to study the fiscal responsibility of the district. Their recommendations impacted, "Non-classroom instructional units include[ing]: district resource teachers, school resource teachers, academic and success coaches, and academic intervention specialists" (Sokol, 2016). As a result of Gibson's recommendations, teacher leaders from all the named categories were offered the opportunity to apply for classroom teaching positions, or—in the case of academic coaches such as reading and writing coaches—begin a dual role of teacher leadership and classroom teaching. This practice was studied in Margolis and Huggins (2012) as an "emergent model of shared, distributed leadership" (p. 954; Spillane, et.al., 2007). In their study, Margolis and Huggins (2012) coined the term Hybrid Teacher Leaders or "HTLs" (p. 954) to describe individuals who occupy the dual roles of teacher leader and classroom teacher. In their study, Margolis and Huggins (2012) studied the experiences of six HTLs from four separate districts using interviews, focus groups, observations, and artifacts from the work they conducted over the length of the study. Their work serves to highlight some of the challenges associated with the practice, particularly in the areas of time management, role definition, and relationship building. Based on their findings, Margolis and Huggins (2012) urged districts to create student learning benchmarks before hiring teacher leaders, to clearly identify the role of the HTLs before hiring, and to specify the ways in which HTL's paid time would best be used at the school level to meet the goals (p. 978).

Though Margolis and Huggins (2012) studied the role of HTLs, research has yet to be done on the human impact of such a role—particularly as it relates to the HTL's feelings of self-

efficacy, self-worth, and job satisfaction. In addition, studies have been generic when referencing the type of teacher leader the participant was prior to her movement back to the classroom; likewise, the research has been mute about the subject taught once the participant made her return. This is important, because academic coaches specializing in literacy face a host of tensions unique to their positions. While all coaches can find the number of responsibilities they hold to be overwhelming and perceive the conflicting demands of principals, teachers, and district personnel to be stressful (Cantrel, Madden, Rintamaa, Almasi, & Carter, 2015; Al Otaiba, Hosp, Smartt, & Dole, 2008; Bean, Draper, Hall, Vandermolen, & Zigmond, 2010; Blarney, Meyer, & Walpole, 2009; DiMeglio & Mangin, 2010; Walpole & Blarney, 2008), literacy coaches have the additional demands of, "external factors, such as policy mandates, district contexts, and relationships with principals" (Cantrel, Madden, Rintamaa, Almasi, & Carter, 2015; Mangin, 2009; Matsumura, Sartoris, Bickel, & Gamier, 2009; McLean, Mallozzi, Hu, & Dailey, 2010). It is for these reasons I have conducted this study. It is my hope this study will shed light on my lived experiences and reported emotions as in individual in an HTL role, leading to a better understanding of the tensions I perceived as affecting my performance. The results of this study may inspire further research leading to recommendations for making the transition from fully-released teacher leadership to a Hybrid Teacher Leader role.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Vignette: So Many Questions

*As I enter through the doors of the Instructional Services Center on my way to a monthly HTL meeting, I cast my glance around the familiar surroundings. Although I only come here in the morning once a month now, at one time I spent every Friday in this building for my fully-released academic coach training and meetings. In that time, the fully-released academic coaches would come together from their different sites, bringing both food and data to share. Lively discussion was always part of the Friday meetings, and whatever troubles I had when I arrived could be shared and workshopped so I had a plan for the following week. It was so productive and so helpful that it was a joy to put on my schedule each week.*

*I call a "Hello!" to the ladies at the reception desk; they know me well and do* not ask for *my ID or make me get a printed badge, even though I am no longer a fully-released academic coach. It feels nice to belong…I have not felt that in my new school yet.*

*As I enter room 102, one of the largest rooms in the building, I glance around at the few individuals who have arrived before me. As time passes, I note there are not many entering, and the room is still really empty. I sit and review the agenda for today. Another packed schedule. Where is the pre-arranged time for group discussion? Where is the "problem-posed-problem-solved" session so familiar to us academic coaches? I wonder if they do not want us to speak with one another…and, if so, why?*

*As the meeting begins, the room is still only a quarter full. I think back to the first meetings we had over the summer; a packed room, an excited buzz of discussion and the familiar*

*talk of friends who have not gotten together in a while. Where did that go? I have so many questions. How am I ever going to find out if others feel the same way I do?*

## Theoretical Framework

There are two different theories which have shaped my thought process about the ways in which those in Hybrid Teacher Leader positions see themselves, as well as their perceptions of the ways others see them. Though each individually speaks to the duality of the role and to the perceptions one may have about the role, only one speaks to the ways in which these perceptions shape one's identity and can affect the way an HTL could both carry out the responsibilities and perceive their efficacy in the role as a vehicle to shape their own notion of what it is to be an HTL. In addition to these two theories, the study of Imposter Syndrome in psychology has illuminated some of the feelings those who hold positions of power share when faced with conflict.

## Role Theory

Role theory holds, as seen by the social constructivist, the formation of a role is "understood to be the result of a dynamic interactive process between and among individuals" (Munroe, 2014, p. 6). Schmidt (2000) explained "roles are fundamentally about purposes—ideal and actual—expected by and taken from others or created and made by oneself" (p. 830). When the individual perceives a conflict in the role—or roles—they perform, there may be issues not easily resolved.

Owens (2004) defines several key terms important to Role Theory. *Role description* is an individual's description of the actual behavior of her own performance of the role; *role*

*prescription* is the culturally accepted norm of the role; *role expectation* is the expectation that role behavior will remain consistent across members in the role; and *role perception* is the perception an individual in the role expects others to hold for their performance. When *role expectation* and *role perceptions* are not aligned, there is said to be *role conflict*. From these, it can be suggested issues of authority, identity, influence, and power may all be related to the social construction of role (Munroe, 2014).

The *role definition* of a teacher leader is one who provides leadership (often in the form of mentoring and training) to teachers. In terms of *role prescription,* ideally teacher leaders do not teach classes; instead, they have the freedom to work with teachers throughout the day, moving in and out of classrooms as needed while researching support materials in between. The role of a teacher leader generally brings with it some gravitas. As those who have ascended to the role of teacher leader have typically taught with success for a considerable length of time, and have earned praise for their accomplishments, their *role expectation* is to provide support with confidence and respect. A positive *role perception* is often the result of the teacher leader's enjoyment with the ability to share their knowledge with others, and in so doing provide their colleagues a means to increase their own level of success and better enjoy their own roles.

The *role definition* of a classroom teacher is one who provides instruction to students. In terms of *role prescription,* teachers plan lessons, procure materials, provide instruction to students throughout the school day, and assess students' attainment of the learning goals by grading work. A teacher's *role expectation* is to provide students with the information and guidance they need to be successful in accomplishing the subject goals, and to do so with a degree of respect from the students. However, their *role perception* is often tied to student performance; teachers are rated by how well the students perform in the classroom and on the

various tests they take during the school year. Additionally, teachers may be more or less likely to have a positive *role perception* based on the level of instruction they are assigned to provide (honors classes versus regular classes) or based on the classroom behavior of the students.

Though Role Theory can be readily understood for each role on its own, the role of a Hybrid Teacher Leader or HTL—meaning an individual who has teacher leader responsibilities for part of the school day and is a classroom teacher for the remainder of the school day (Margolis & Huggins, 2012)—is yet to be easily defined. While they hold the definition, prescription, expectations, and perceptions of both positions, the existence of *role conflict* can only be ascertained on a case-by-case basis after examination of the *role expectation* and *role prescription* for each part of the position. Whenever there is conflict, there are accompanying tensions to the individual performing the role. In this study, I have explored these tensions, their sources, and their possible preventions or resolutions to clarify the ways in which my hybrid role as an HTL impacted my perceptions and performance of the two individual roles of classroom teacher and instructional coach.

## Cultural Identities and Figured Worlds

One's identity is what shapes the ways in which they perceive their reality and act upon those perceptions. In their book *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*, Holland et al. (1998) explore how identities are shaped by the rules, norms, and customs of the culture, and by the ways the individual perceives him or herself in relation to that culture. "People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 3). By this theory, people learn their role based on what they perceive from the established culture; their actions may be taken to support or reject

their place in the role, but the recognition of the cultural role is evident regardless. While individuals possess this agency, if one desires to enter a social disposition one must recognize and attach significance to the ways the prevailing culture behaves and acts—and then perform accordingly.

Holland et al. (1998) theorize people tend to characterize their roles based on their recognition of what they perceive as the norm for their role. Here Holland et al. (1998) uses the term "figured worlds" or "socially and culturally constructed realms of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (p. 52). So, while an interning teacher may not be a fully developed teacher, he or she will act in a manner "as if" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 49) the development has already been attained. This performance is not static, in as much as perceptions of one's performance shape future iterations of the role. "A figured world is formed and re-formed in relation to the everyday activities and events that ordained happenings within it" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 53).

Given their status as teacher leaders for half the typical school day and classroom teachers for the remainder of the typical school day, it seems Hybrid Teacher Leaders need to walk in two different figured worlds. In one, the teacher leader perceives the need to be regarded at the top of her professional skill level, and as such attempts to construct her actions and behaviors to be ultra-professional and beyond reproach. In the other, the classroom teacher perceives the reality of student unpredictability and embraces the knowledge that planning does not always result in model lessons. Because the Hybrid Teacher Leader is a single person attempting to enact two separate roles with differing aims, it would make sense the actions of one will invariably stray into the other. To put it in terms of my own performance, when in the

classroom teacher role, my desire to be held in high esteem caused me to feel as if the pitfalls of the lesson were unacceptable; when in the teacher leader role, my unsuccessful lesson made me question my ability to perform as an expert in the field. When taking my cues about my performance from the feedback I was receiving from others to enact the appropriate alterations to my performance of the figured world, I may have perceived feedback inaccurately based on my own feelings of success or failure.

## Imposter Syndrome

The term Imposter Syndrome was coined by Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes at Georgia State University in 1978. Clance and Imes observed in high-achieving individuals a sense of the inability to live up to other's expectations and a hyper-focus on mistakes rather than on success. With origins extending back to an individual's childhood, the syndrome usually occurs in those who have attained their positions quickly or who are first generation professionals (those who are first in their family to attain a college degree and a resulting professional position). The syndrome can result in "performance anxiety and lead to perfectionism, burnout, and depression" (Sherman, 2013, p. 57).

I am proud to be the first graduate with a BA in my family (though, to give credit, my father earned his BA and graduated just a month after I did). My parents always held high expectations of me and planned on college in my future. I credit them with the drive I have; seeking to be competent and trustworthy are always attributes I have considered to be assets. But reading more about what can be elicited from feeling like an imposter has made me curious. As I embarked on this journey, I measured what I have learned about Imposter Syndrome against the feelings I experienced to gain perspective. Did the roles conflict? Did my enactment of what I

believed a Hybrid Teacher Leader to be cause me to experience tensions? Or was I experiencing the effects of Imposter Syndrome? As I dug deeper into the feelings and experiences, I have come to understand more about what happened during that time.

## Methodology: Autoethnography

As I begin discussing my choice of methodology, I find myself needing to revisit my research questions:

- As I reflect on the events and emotions of my work as an HTL in a high school and write my autoethnography, in what ways might I discover more about myself as a classroom teacher, a teacher leader, and a Hybrid Teacher Leader?
- How might my awareness of these discoveries assist me in my future work?
- How might my discoveries assist others in Hybrid Teacher Leader roles?
- In what ways might my discoveries inform the role expectations of those who manage Hybrid Teacher Leaders, or of the HTLs themselves?

I have employed the methodology of autoethnography in my dissertation to study the feelings and emotions I experienced during my work in a Hybrid Teacher Leadership role in a high school in the public education system. As an HTL I was an academic coach to a staff of about 115 teachers and a classroom teacher to three classes of unruly 9$^{th}$ and 10$^{th}$ grade students. As such, I am intimately aware of the tensions and elations, the directives and the norms, the purposes, and the realities. And yet, I realize existing literature has done little to help illuminate many of those elements.

Historically, educational research has been a quantitative endeavor. Quantitative methods of research are favored in educational research by those who are the decision-makers. Boyask,

when discussing Metz's (2000) comments regarding qualitative methodologies in relation to quantitative, "Whilst empirical research currently assumes importance in the development and evaluation of education writ large, qualitative research methodologies are largely considered secondary to quantitative approaches in producing robust forms of evidence," (2012, p. 22). And while empirical data may rule in decision-making, numbers and statistics can do little to answer the questions I have and illuminate the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of an individual in an HTL role.

When qualitative methods were first employed in educational research, they were often conducted from a sociological perspective (Delamont, 2013). Qualitative methodologies as a whole are inherently focused on lived experiences rather than what is generalizable and widely applicable. However, qualitative methods are criticized for those same attributes, as those who favor empirical research argue qualitative research provides, "…research that is interesting and insightful, but lacks general application," (Boyask, 2012, p. 23). However, researchers who employ qualitative methods are not deterred by the lack of generalizability, as it is not a limitation. Rather than generalizability, qualitative methods offer, "…the lived reality of individuals, and the ways that they make meaning and act within that reality…contribut[ing] to general understandings of agency, practice, and social structure," (Clegg, 2005). However, as Delamont noted in 1997, the history of qualitative research in education often revealed, "…the narrow focus on teachers and pupils in a restricted range of settings, the lack of challenge to familiarity, and…the failure of qualitative education researchers to notice, or respond to, the crisis of representation," (p. 604). Researchers using conventional qualitative methods, such as case study or ethnography for example, must hold research *etic,* a distance of the researcher from the participants used to remove as much of the subjective as possible. While the research may be

about teachers, it would not be by teachers—or at least the teachers at the center of the research. This, however, creates a problem of authenticity—who is or is not an insider versus an outsider. Authors of more conventional qualitative research spend a great deal of time indicating the ways in which they are not insiders, some despite the appearance of being an insider (for example Kusow, 2003). Delamont goes on to state, "…qualitative research changes the investigator; research taken seriously challenges aspects of the self," (1997, p. 604). And yet, traditional qualitative methodologies resist the *emic*, fight the familiarity, and refuse the researcher the ability to express the changes they have—or should have—experienced through their research. This sort of distance is precisely what my work avoids; autoethnography allows me to begin in the stance of an insider who knows *what* happened—but not *why* it happened—and then to journey toward self-discovery through the analysis of my own story. "Autoethnography is the study of one's own culture and oneself as part of that culture" (Patton, 2002, p. 85). Considered the newest qualitative method, this combination of ethnography and autobiography is gaining respect as readers begin to insist on methods allowing for the deep understanding of cultures which can only come from someone who has lived in the culture and understands it in the marrow of their bones. The goal of the method, as told by Ellis and Bochner (2011), is to create something "meaningful, accessible, evocative, grounded in personal experience" which will "sensitize the readers to issues of identity politics, experiences shrouded in silence, and deepen the capacity to empathize with people different from us" (p. 274). Autoethnography derives its name from its roots; systematic analysis (graphy) of personal experience (auto) to understand a culture (ethno).

Autoethnographies are often known for evocative topics, and most push the boundaries of what is considered research. This is because autoethnography, "treats research as a political,

socially just, and socially conscious act" (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). The writing is in first person rather than the typical third person, which "mak[es] herself the object of the research and thus breaching the conventional separation of researcher and subjects" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; p. 744; Jackson, 1989). Autoethnography focuses on a single case, which "breaches the traditional concerns of research from generalization across cases to generalization within a case" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 744; Geertz, 1973). The work reads more as literature like a novel or a biography, and "thus fractures the boundaries that normally separate social science from literature" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 744). The text is often written as a narrative, which "refuses the impulse to abstract and explain, stressing the journey over the destination, and thus eclipses the scientific illusion of control and mastery" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 744). Bochner (2000) states, "Evocative stories activate subjectivity and compel emotional responses…offer lessons for further conversation rather than undebatable conclusions" (p. 744).

Whereas autobiography is just a great story about oneself, the ethnography element of the method demands the use of research tools as well. There are similarities between autoethnography and ethnography with respect to research focus, in "the initial focus will be refined, narrowed, and sometimes redirected in the course of study" (Chang, 2008, p. 49). Both Chang (2008) and Ellis and Bochner (2000) point out some researchers focus on broad portions of their lives, while others focus on specific moments in their lives. However, with ethnography, the "viewpoint of the ethnographer implied some important degree of detachment or 'higher' level of conceptual analysis and abstraction" (Patton, 2002, p. 85). Autoethnographers believe research can be rigorous, theoretical, and analytical AND emotional, therapeutic, and inclusive of personal and social phenomena (Ellis et al., 2011). Chang (2008) adduces ethnographers enter an investigation as an *other* within the field of study, while autoethnographers enter an

investigation in the context of *self* within the research field. Not just anything can make it into an autoethnography; researchers using the method dig deep into the memories, speak to those who were there, and comb through their notes, journal entries, and photographs looking for the epiphanies (Ellis & Fraherty, 1992) sparking the memory of the most important moment—the moment everything changed, when life afterwards would never be the same, and when the beginning of a journey commenced. Autoethnographers then turn to the existing research... What does it say? How does it fit with her own understanding of her own culture, and what did it miss? Ellis and Bochner have called the next step "systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall" (2000, p. 737); which is just a fancy way of saying autoethnographers continue to cull through their past, get in touch with the feelings and emotions attached to the events, continue to gather existing research, and then group those elements together into categories illuminating patterns of understanding.

The aspect of subjectivity remains a contentious issue with the acceptance of autoethnographic research. Patton recalls a sociologist who told him "…angrily that those who want to write creative nonfiction or poetry should find their way to the English Department of the university and leave sociology to the sociologists" (2002, p. 86). However, Gates reminds us, "many forms of qualitative and quantitative research have recognized subjectivity as being part and parcel of engaging in research" (2007, p. 193). My own experiences should not be diminished simply because I am the researcher; what I have to share, while not generalizable, offers one story of one HTL serving in a dual role of academic coach and English educator who experienced feelings of tension and conflict in the role of an HTL. As Patton relates, "In autoethnography, then, you use your own experiences to garner insights into the larger culture or subculture of which you are a part" (2002, p. 86). I was an educator in a dual role, and I study

my lived experiences to have a clearer understanding of the reasons I experienced the tensions and conflict.

While there are many forms of autoethnography (poetry, short stories, fiction, photographic essays), I have chosen to present this in narrative form. This seems to me to be the best way to share my experiences in a clear and sequential way. As I journey, the analysis of my own story leads me to revelations important to me, but hopefully also relevant to those in similar positions. Though I employ the same methods as ethnographers—including sensory, visual, and creative approaches to immerse myself in and make sense of the culture (Mills, 2012)—the culture in question is my own rather than one observed from afar. This speaks to the issue I experienced when reading Munroe (2014), Margolis and Doring (2012), Snyder (2016), Cantrel et al., (2015), and Swanson (2011); though I saw and identified with parts of my experience, the differences between my situation and theirs was different enough to break the verisimilitude. As much as I longed to understand better what occurred to me, I further wanted my story to be available to others who would seek answers for their own situations.

## Why autoethnography as a research method?

But when is it appropriate to use the method of autoethnography? Surely the other qualitative methods are excellent ways to study a culture and gain meaningful insight. A better question might be, why would autoethnography be the best method to answer this question about my own culture?

One might argue I could be an ethnographer and invite others who were in HTL positions to tell their stories. Through questioning, and my own experiences as a participant and an observer, I could help illuminate the connections between their experiences and show where the

literature is left wanting. And I agree, it would have been an excellent option. It is not as if I did not think of other methods, but the earlier vignette can give some hint at one of the reasons I elected to proceed with a personal account.

In my district, though there were initially over 100 individuals hired to be HTLs, the number began to dwindle. Some schools had been granted a pair of HTLs and changed their minds; HTLs could then either attempt to find a position at another school, go back to their previous school (if there was an opening), or take a full teaching load at their new school. Most HTLs had been hired from their own schools; those who were unhappy with the arrangements simply took on extra classes as they became available and moved away from the instructional coaching portion of the position. Others just dropped off from coming to the meetings; I was never told why they did not come. For myself, the meetings were too repetitive of the things I already knew from being a fully-released academic coach—in fact, because I keep everything, I was able to bring my binder of already filled out materials and reuse them at the meetings, as none of the materials had been changed (typos and all). Although the meetings were frustrating and time-wasting, I continued to go to them because it gave me time away from my school and a place to go I remembered from better times. Some of my friends from my previous experiences still worked there and during breaks I got a chance to see them and talk. I did not go because I needed training, or because I was proud of my work as an HTL, or to grow in my knowledge and skills. In fact, we rarely shared our experiences and usually did not even talk with one another. The meetings were packed with instructional coaching skills I had been taught over the past four years. It was new to those in the room who had never been instructional coaches, but then even they began to not come to the meetings. I was curious about their reasons for missing what had been billed as “mandatory” meetings; as I never saw them again and did not really know them in

the first place, it was impossible to tell. The first year we had meetings monthly; the second year, the meetings were cancelled altogether; by the third year, the program had collapsed. When the district pulled the funding and allowed each school to allocate their funds to an HTL only if they wished, the program was officially over. But the hybridizing of roles in my district was only in its infancy; it is important, therefore, to share as much as possible about what went wrong in my case to prevent a similar situation from occurring in the future.

As I began my work, I became concerned this might not be a big enough issue about which to research. If I am the only one of whom I am aware with these experiences, the program appears to be dying out, and I cannot even pull together a few individuals who might illuminate the issue further, is this really a serious point of study? Does one person's story make a culture or represent a culture? While I cannot claim to be the spearhead of a culture, I know my case is one with the potential to illuminate the issue and can offer a deeper perspective of the internal feelings I had during the experience. Teachers so infrequently have the opportunity to sit and reflect; getting to this level of detail with another individual would be difficult—if not impossible. But my reflection was ongoing. It followed me home at night; it whispered to me in the dark when I could not sleep; it pulled up a chair to the table at my holiday celebrations. Through the depth of my experience, it is my hope instructional coaches in hybridized positions—as well as those who are contemplating such a position or those in administration asking others to take on such a role— will have moments of verisimilitude as they read about my experiences.

As I look at what I have already gathered in terms of data, my journals, calendars and planning pages, and email from that time I realize my own story has the most salient information about the feelings and the emotions I traveled through in my first year of my dual role.

Autoethnography is always written in hindsight (Bruner, 1993; Denzin, 1989; Freeman, 2004) for just this reason; all of this has already happened to me. It is a part of my past, and I can access it—though I usually have to consult my journal entries, my calendar from the year, items I created for use in teaching during the year, the greeting cards I received for my bereavement—to remember the kinds of detail I will need to do this work (Delany, 2004; Didion, 2005; Goodall, 2006; Herrman, 2005). As I reread some of the pieces I am instantaneously transported back to the time and place where it happened…feel again what I felt then...and when I return to the here and now, I know I can never get the same kind of detail, emotions, and insight from anyone else's story. In a case study I could use another person's journal entries…if they cared to share them with me. However, not many people author journals with the kinds of details which would allow me to transport myself into the situation to know their feelings and emotions. I can read their story and label their emotion as angry…but I know why I would be angry, not why they were. This has always been a problem with research presented from an outside view; the "truths" and the "facts" scientists "found" are tied to the vocabularies and paradigms of the researcher (Kuhn, 1996). I am aware, however, a limitation of autoethnography is an exclusive reliance on memory and recalling as a sole data source, with self-isolation from others in my cultural group (Chang, 2008). As a result, I have shared my work with another HTL who worked at my school during the time I was in the role; I have asked her to add her recollections of the events, to challenge my memory, and to offer critique of my analysis. Her insights have been invaluable; though she was not aware of many of the things I was thinking during the incidents I mention in my story, she was often aware of the incidents themselves and could provide me with an outside perspective and help me question the impact of my analysis.

Autoethnographies are often written in a nonlinear format dictated more by purpose rather than by a chronology of events. It is therefore imperative for autoethnographers to clearly state the purpose of their research and to narrow the topic to the specific area of study in her life. She must remember the data she collects on herself includes others as well. Each remembrance includes a host of characters whose feelings and privacy must be protected. As such, it is important to be transparent about the data to be collected, how that data collection will take place, how it will be managed, interpreted, analyzed, and stored (Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Although I am the primary source of the data, the stories often include others (i.e., my students, my colleagues, my administration). Protecting their privacy is more difficult because I am the autoethnographer and my identity is therefore disclosed. Those around me—whether explicitly involved in my narrative or not—are more transparent to the audience (Morse, 2002; Chang, 2008). Where references take place with respect to others' names, I use pseudonyms or omit the names altogether and instead use identifiers such as job titles. When the job titles are specific to the district in which I teach, and therefore could inadvertently reveal my district, I have changed the title to one within a broader category (i.e.: academic coach, HTL, classroom teacher). In respect to the location of the study, I will speak in the broadest sense to diminish opportunities for easy identification.

## Participant Selection

As this is an autoethnography, it should come as no surprise I am the sole participant on this journey. For purposes of identification, I am a Caucasian, non-Hispanic, middle-class, cisgender female, originally from the North of the United States of America. I am well-educated, holding both a BA and an MA in education. At the time of publishing, I am 49-years old; at the

time of the events of my story I was 44-years old. I will be sharing the events and emotions I experienced during the time I was an HTL. Along the way, I will examine these stories against my theoretical framework to make sense of what happened. By the end of this journey, I have gained perspective and a deeper understanding. Through this discovery, I have shed light on how I might proceed given the opportunity to engage in a similar role. This is important, as I hope to attain a position as a professor at a university; it is clear from my understanding of the work that I will be engaging in multiple roles (teacher, researcher, writer, speaker, counselor) and this journey sheds light on ways to mindfully engage in all those roles.

While I was unable in my time as an HTL to speak with others in my position in the kind of depth which would be meaningful for my research, subsequent events have led me to opportunities to communicate with others who are in similar HTL positions about their experiences. While their words do not appear in this study, this communication has been greatly beneficial to me, providing a mirror for some of the feelings I had, the actions I took, and the ways in which I and others perceived the efficacy of my work. In addition, there are times their experiences vary so widely from my own that it complicates my position and prompts me to re-examine and evaluate my initial thoughts. Sometimes, as I reread my journal, their words come back to me, and I experience a sense of verisimilitude. It is my hope others will read my stories and experience the same.

COVID-19 has brought about many changes to the everyday lives of most Americans. Education has been an area of significant adaptation, beginning in March 2020 with most teachers and students being tasked with learning how to educate and how to be educated in an eLearning platform. As the Fall of 2020 arrived, most schools in Florida opened their classrooms once more to teachers and students who had been longing for the traditional experience. But as

the state grappled with budgets and how best to fund districts, a reduction to in-person learning often accompanied budget cuts, resulting in larger class sizes for some teachers and a loss of job units for others. Instructional coach positions were often viewed as a way to eliminate a position without the direct impact to students of losing their assigned classroom teachers. When confronted by the potential loss of instructional coaches, principals saw hybridizing the instructional coach position with classroom teaching to be the way to save the position and the person who does so much for the school. While many instructional coaches were not exactly thrilled about the hybridization of their position, most I have talked with were extremely grateful to have had their principal think so highly of them and to still have a position at the school they love. Oftentimes, however, the hybridization took place with a single instructional coach position at the school, leading to a similar sense of isolation I experienced when I was an HTL.

An HTL who had once been at my school as reading coach and department head, was now at a brand-new school in the same district during its inaugural year. Her principal saw hybridizing her position as the only way to save her role at the school, and he placed her in charge of not only the reading coach and reading department head roles, but as classroom teacher to two classes and as planning and grading for another two courses which were at the time staffed with long-term substitutes. We would often text and talk in the evenings after school, and she would relate to me how her experience was going. I asked if she knew of others in the district in a similar position as she, and she replied to the affirmative. Remembering the ways in which I would have found sharing my experience to be cathartic and remembering the isolation I felt when I was in a similar circumstance, I asked if we could all gather on a Zoom call to talk about our experiences as an HTL. Although I had intended for this to be a one-time meeting, this began a monthly discussion which continued for a few months. Meeting for an hour on mornings on

days off (like Veteran's Day and the Monday of Fall Break) we share, encourage, and sometimes cry. The fact these three ladies voluntarily take the time from their miniscule amount of free time to meet demonstrates the value they perceive in these meetings. The three ladies spend most of the time sharing their experiences and the related feelings they are experiencing. Because they are all currently HTLs, they can give suggestions and advice to make the job easier, and they all understand the scenario—even if the specific situation of which another speaks has not yet been experienced personally. As I am currently not an HTL, my role is to provide a safe space to share and to ask a few specific questions to help tease out details of the experience they might be overlooking or underestimating in terms of impact. I have witnessed the ladies making notes to themselves and using the ah-ha moments to frame their weeks going forward. For my part, these discussions again transported me back to my time as an HTL and help me to realize the importance of this work. Although my experiences were challenging to me when they were happening, I did not have the worry of being without a job or with the health of my family in a worldwide pandemic. However, they have also helped me to see the hybridizing of instructional coaching positions with classroom teacher positions is an ongoing issue and few—if any—lessons appear to have been learned or planned for by administration and district personnel, leading to situations which often seem to me to be a repeat of events I experienced when I was in the HTL role. As such, I hope my work will inform the *role expectations* (Owens, 2004) of others who are contemplating similar positions, or those who are administrators for them.

## Data Sources and Selection

Data collection in autoethnography is similar to that in ethnography, in the data is collected from the naturally occurring environment while participating in the activities pertaining

to the field of study. However, the main difference is in the participant; where ethnography focuses on the lives of the other, autoethnography focuses on the life of the self (Chang, 2008). Much of the data comes from recall, which according to Chang (2008) is really no different in principle from the recall used in ethnographies because both ethnographers and autoethnographers rely on memory when collecting data. The main difference, however, is the source of the memory; while ethnographers value the memory of informants in the culture, the autoethnographer values her personal memory (Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In this autoethnography, therefore, I openly acknowledge my memory as a primary data source, while most ethnographers would abstain from blending their personal memories with the data they have collected during their field work (Chang, 2008).

Autoethnographers often begin the process of data collection by focusing memory on a particular time in her life, though some may extend those recollections to her whole lifespan (Chang, 2008). The focus is on major events within the designated time, with a particular focus on items which feel most useful to the research focus (Chang, 2008). Autoethnographers may use strategies to help in the visualization process (i.e., free drawing or diagrams) to solidify memory recall and provide a sort of timeline of events (Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This will also help when later attempting to unpack the events in writing, so readers have enough background to contextualize the data (Chang, 2008). It is through this process the autoethnographer can record actual events, as well as the thoughts and emotions accompanying them, in the context of her daily life (Chang 2008). Chang adds,

> Planning what to observe and record needs to be carefully planned out in your research design. For example, you can self-observe and record your behaviors, thoughts, or emotions at certain time intervals or by occurrence; in a narrative format or pre-formatted recording sheets; and immediately when they occur or after you retreat from your action field. (2008, p. 91)

Data in autoethnography is often characterized by internal and external data. Internal data is often collected using a field journal, collecting and capturing self-reflective data while also collecting self-observational data (Chang 2008). Because memory is often faulty—subject to misremembering, revision, and omission—it is important to recognize my reliance on the artifacts I have saved from the 2016-2017 school year. Throughout the course of my first and second years as an HTL, I kept a journal of my experiences. When I had great experiences, I wrote about the situation and my feelings; when I had negative experiences, I wrote about those as well. Sometimes, the writing was reflective and helped me to make decisions going forward. Other times, the writing was cathartic; I was giving myself the permission to fully feel what I was feeling, so I could manage my emotions and move forward productively.

I also kept a detailed calendar of the events of those two years. It listed the events of my days, color-coded for classroom events, HTL events, test proctoring, meetings, and training. At first, it was a way of accounting for my time and to demonstrate my value to the administration to maintain the perceived usefulness of my position. However, as time went on it became a tangible account of the dwindling coaching meetings, the endless planning sessions and professional development requirements, and the never-ending tally of days spent in test proctoring. When combined with my journal, the calendars helped to establish an even greater context than some of my entries—some of which were terse and lacked the detail of how many days it had been since an event or of a series of events. The calendars helped to bring those into perspective and enrich my recollections.

Another source of data collected by autoethnographers is external data. External data allows for perspective outside of one's own memory and allows for the examination of her subjectivity (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992). External sources of data can come from a variety of sources

including text messages, email, photographs, and video images (among others). The purpose of collecting external data is two-fold: external data can be used to spark memory and aid in self-observation and self-reflection; external data sources also provide additional data to help fill in the gaps in memory or recorded data, allowing for better contextualization. External data also has the effect of connecting the autoethnographer's individual story with the world outside of herself (Chang, 2008). The bulk of my external data comes from the email I saved from the job hunt, materials I collected during the coaching sessions I conducted during the time I was an HTL, the notes I made during those sessions, teacher training materials from the inservice classes I taught, and some student work collected from my classes with high school students.

The tasks of collecting and maintaining the data can become overwhelming to the autoethnographer if she does not develop a system of data management. That is because anything could potentially be deemed a piece of evidence if it elicits an internal response of feelings and emotions important to the specified time of study. As such, Chang (2008) recommends a data management system wherein data is collected in a timely manner, possibly organized by data labeling with the collection day and time, the collector (if not the autoethnographer herself), the collection technique, and the data source. Labeling of this sort often follows the 4-Ws approach of who, what, when, and where. The labeled data is then ready to be classified. By coding the data set and sorting the data into groups, it will be easier to analyze them later (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Over time, it may be necessary to refine the data, removing those items which are redundant which may make areas needing additional data more apparent. This data refinement is only the initial data analysis (Chang, 2008). As autoethnography is not a linear process, the analyzing and interpreting of the data does not preclude the collection of more data

as gaps may become apparent only after the analysis and interpretation process has begun (Chang, 2008).

## Data Collection for My Autoethnography: Email

In my case, there is a bit of serendipity at hand in the collection of my data. As a teacher, I consider myself a member of a long tradition of pack-rats. I tend to save everything for long stretches of time, not having a plan for how—or if—it will be used but knowing it may one day be important.

Email was my first ongoing collection. The email system my district had at the time placed all incoming email into a main folder. The email would remain for a period of time (usually up to a semester, except in cases where several high-volume pieces of mail—those with large attachments, for example—had been kept) and then would start to automatically delete with the oldest disappearing first to allow for more room for new mail. From the beginning, my department head advised me to create personal folders in my email and to shift my email into them periodically; she knew the email system allowed us to store the email into folders indefinitely; once it was in a folder, the system would not delete it. Following her advice, yearly (during pre-planning) I would create an email folder labeled with the school year. I would also have other folders marked for specific events, projects, or clubs, for ongoing subject-specific email collection.

In that tradition, I had an email folder for the 2015-2016 school year in my school email. In the Spring of 2016, I made a special folder I called “job hunt”. I placed in it all of the email pertaining to the changes with the academic coaching program of which I was a part, as well as all of the emails concerning application deadlines, updates about interviews, and discussions

between other academic coaches and myself. And then I left it there, just as I had left the email folders from all of the school years I had taught. When I began conceiving of this study, I looked back to the "job hunt" folder and found a timeline of events as to how my time as a fully-released academic coach ended and my time as an HTL began.

In 2020, the district in which I worked decided to move to a new email system. Our previous email could be saved as .pdf documents, could be printed, could be forwarded to the new email system (though forwarding would eliminate the dates and times of the original email), or could just be left in the email system to be eliminated when the switch took place. Knowing the importance of the email in the "job hunt" folder, I saved all of those email as .pdf documents and printed them for my data folder. Unfortunately, I did not retain any of the other email from the actual first school year of my time as an HTL; much of it would have had to do with meetings, student data collection, parent concerns about student progress and the like. As all email within our school district is considered open to the public, I did not put anything in writing I would not have wanted shared with my principal, district personnel, or parents. The topics pertaining to my study would have largely been discussed outside of the email system.

## Data Collection for My Autoethnography: Calendars

My calendars from the 2016-2017 school year were essential for pulling together my recollections of my first year as an HTL. When I was a fully-released academic coach, I had needed to keep detailed weekly calendars showing where I would be and at what times so I could account for my time and demonstrate I worked with each of my mentees on a regular basis. I was encouraged to color-code them to make them easier to understand (for instance, I had a different color for each of my schools and another set of colors for evaluation periods). The use of a

calendar was so ingrained in me at the end of those four years, I continued the process in my own planner calendar book when I began working as an HTL. Meetings were in green, school events were in blue, academic coaching sessions were in purple, and personal days/events were in pink. Later, I needed to add proctoring days, which were in orange. The addition of the blotter calendar came a few days into the school year. My department head was looking for me during my first three academic coaching periods and wondered where she could look for me in the future. She suggested a posted calendar of some sort; she thought the posted calendar would help those looking for me and permit some transparency about how I was utilizing those three periods. I decided on the blotter pages as I could mark the calendar going forward in months (unlike with a dry erase single month calendar) and I could rip off and keep the pages (which, as a pack-rat, I thought I might need to use later). The color-coding system was the same, and it was a labor-intensive process to make sure what appeared on the blotter made it onto the planner calendar. At the end of each month, I would scan over the blotter and the planner and be sure all of the events were the same on each before filing away the blotter pages. Though it was labor intensive, I am grateful I took the time; over the years, I have retained the calendar books from my years of teaching, but I have not retained the majority of the blotter pages. In addition, after my time as an HTL ended, I stopped using the blotter pages altogether; I began using them for others' use rather than my own and could not justify the time wasted in documenting everything twice.

## Data Collection for My Autoethnography: Journal Entries

In fourth grade, my parents moved me to a new school. Before school opened, we were invited to come to the school to meet the teachers and pick up school supply lists. This was my

first experience with having a journal. We were given time to write in our journals daily once school began, and often used items from our journals to publish (like poetry). Although I fell out of the habit of writing in a journal every day, I did take the time occasionally to make note of my thoughts and feelings in the planner (I did not use the teacher planner pages as most teachers do—so those were empty for my musings). Though I did not have many of these entries, the ones I did have were poignant reminders of the thoughts and feelings I had during the various parts of the school year. They helped me to shape the mood of my vignettes and reminded me of incidental happenings which seemed important enough to record at the time.

### Data Collection for My Autoethnography: Grades, Observations, and Evaluation

In a district of our size, there is no shortage of programs designed to make grading, observations, and evaluations easier and more user friendly. Though this is the design, often changes to the programs necessitate actions on the part of the employee to save and manage the data from previous years.

In the fourth year of my return to teaching, our district moved to another grading system. Though we would still have access to our previous system for a time, I was quick to download all of the gradebooks from the previous system as Excel documents prior to the change. Those gradebooks factor into my assessment of my students' success during the first year as an HTL and proved helpful in an honest assessment of my work during that time.

Another program employed within the district collects the observation data from the informal and formal evaluation process. The data include pre-observation lesson plans, actual observation notes and scores, and the overall evaluation document for each school year. Though the system did retain each of the documents, I downloaded a .pdf copy and saved it for my own

use. I found it much easier to use the data in this form rather than to connect to the server and move through the series of pages to retrieve the years-old data. This material was helpful in allowing me to see my principal's thoughts on my performance as well as my own assessment at the time, all of which was useful in this work.

## Data Analysis

The process of data analysis and interpretation are the ways in which the disparate pieces of data come together to tell the story of the observed phenomenon (Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). "Analysis and interpretation enable researchers to shift their focus from merely scavenging or quilting information bits to actively transforming them into a text with culturally meaningful explanations" (Chang, 2008, p. 126). Chang (2008) goes on to recommend ten strategies to use when analyzing and interpreting data: "search for recurring topics, themes and patterns, look for cultural themes, identify exceptional occurrences, analyze inclusion and omission, connect the present with the past, analyze relationships between self and others, compare yourself with other peoples' cases, contextualize broadly, compare with social science constructs and ideas and frame with theories" (p. 23).

Once I had gathered the data, my first step was to read through it thoroughly, writing memos when I saw something I felt to be important for answering my research questions. Sometimes I found gaps in one area of the data and made a memo to look for hints as to what was happening at the same time in another form of data (i.e.: gaps in journaling were usually at very busy times as evidenced by the calendar). I was able during the time to discard redundant pieces of data; I had a few of the large blotter pages from the first year as an HTL which were

mirrored in my planner calendar. This helped in my triangulation of the data, as I was certain I had not left anything out.

Having been through the data once, I began writing the vignettes. I drew upon the journal entries I did have for the mood of the vignettes; the topics flowed from points I felt highlighted crucial parts of my experience. Not all of the vignettes I wrote made it into the final product, as not all of them were helpful in telling the story of what happened. I selected and labeled that which was best and labeled the others to be retained with the rest of my data, even though they would not be used.

I then studied my vignettes, making memos when I found connections to my research. Those connections then led me back to the existing literature, adding to the memos to connect what I had found to the theories on which I had grounded my work. While my first memos were generalized, subsequent readings of the vignettes were done with each of the lenses in mind and my memos became more focused. From time-to-time, I had a moment where new revelations came to me and changed the way I saw the data; I documented those in my findings, as they were helpful in my understanding of what happened, why it happened, and how it changed me and my performance of the HTL role.

What follows is a layered account, which places my experience alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature. As Charmaz states, layered accounts illustrate how "data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously" (1983, p. 110; Ellis et al., 2011, p. 278). While this is true of both grounded theory—Charmaz's topic—and autoethnography, layered accounts in autoethnography "use vignettes, reflectivity, multiple voices, and introspection" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 278). This structure has allowed me to blend pieces of my own journals, calendars, plans, etc., my newly written vignettes, along with my own analysis and realizations gained from

my review of the literature. In this manner, I have shared the circumstances of what happened in deep detail, my analysis, and then how this work is not only supported by the literature but adds to the body of knowledge on the topic as well.

## Writing the Autoethnography

Of the process of autoethnography, Ellis et al. describes the method researchers use as "aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience" (2011, p. 277) helping the researcher to "discover patterns of cultural experience" (2011, p. 277) described through storytelling, allowing for both "showing and telling" (2011, p. 277) in a manner having "alterations of authorial voice" (2011, p. 277). As they write, they add back in those journal entries, those photographs, those stories; not only because they make the writing better, but because they offer the reader verisimilitude. Autoethnographers "ask their readers to feel the truth of their stories and to become coparticipants, engaging in the story line morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 745; Richardson, 1994). It is that verisimilitude which will help the audience to like the writing and believe the writing; know that what was said is possible and seems true. Gergen and Gergen (2002) state:

> Using oneself as an ethnographic exemplar, the researcher is freed from the traditional conventions of writing. One's unique voicing—complete colloquialisms, reverberations from multiple relationships, and emotional expressiveness—is honored. In this way the reader gains a sense of the writer as a full human being. (p. 14)

Though autoethnography must be more than storytelling to be rigorous research, storytelling is at the heart of the research as is the basis for understanding both the culture and the problem of study within the culture. Autoethnography as a method of research asks the researcher to dig deep, lay bare their soul, and write honestly—even when it hurts. Ellis (2016) calls it "research

focused on human longing, pleasure, pain, grief, suffering, or joy…holding authors to a higher standard of vulnerability." (p. 54) It also asks the researcher to write beautifully, as the writing needs to capture the essence of the culture, the feelings of the researcher, as well as the heart and mind of the reader. The style this writing takes can be one of many. The descriptive-realistic style is one in which the autoethnographer is encouraged to be as descriptive and meticulous as possible in the storytelling process (Bochner & Ellis, 1996). The confessional-emotive style is one in which the author expresses the confusion, problems, and dilemmas in life, thereby being vulnerable and inviting the reader to participate in the story being told (Chang, 2008) and giving the autoethnographer the power to speak to the heart of the reader (Ellis, 2004). Autoethnographers may also use an analytical-interpretative style wherein the autoethnographer uses analysis and interpretation of the storytelling to reveal the multiple meanings which can come from the study (Chang, 2008). Imaginative-creative writing is also a style used in autoethnography—and one with which "those traditional, analytic social scientists who insisted on clinging to objectivity, detachment, theory-building, and generalization as terminal goals of scientific theory" (Ellis & Bochner, 2016, p. 45) would most assuredly disagree—and is one which seems at most to depart from the writing most often found in the academy (Chang, 2008). In the imaginative-creative style, the autoethnographer uses her "imaginative energy…through a variety of genres—poetry fiction and drama. His/her creativity is the only limit to this type of style" (Chang, 2008, p. 148).

As with many autoethnographers, I have blended a couple of the different types of writing into one which best represents the research. I have used a descriptive-realistic style to convey the vignettes, as well as the various diary entries and calendar events. My hope is to provide material in which others, through the power and depth of the description in the

storytelling, can see themselves and their own experiences or imagine them being so given the situation. However, the depth of the description has also, at times, required the confessional-emotive style, as I have shared moments which are deeply personal and often painful with the goal of a deeper understanding and connection for the reader.

All autoethnographies are written in first person. In high school and BA and MA courses we are taught to eradicate the "I": third person is said to be the writing of academics. However, so many pieces written in third person seem detached, removed, cold; they mimic the distance *etic* researchers were attempting to hold to make their research seem valid and informed, but not too close to the "subjects." It makes sense for autoethnographies to be written in first person; the *etic* of distance from the culture is simply nonexistent in this methodology. My writing is about me in my own voice and from my own perspective, and readers are invited to engage in my experiences as well.

## Researcher Positionality/Reflexivity

By choosing autoethnography as my methodology, I am accepting Louis's (1991) argument "I am an instrument of my inquiry: and the inquiry is inseparable from who I am" (p. 365). Because of my position as a member of the culture about which I write, I disabuse the reader of any notion of myself as an independent, objective observer (Stacey, 1996).

My writing comes from the experiences in which I engaged while in the first of the two years during which I served in a dual role; though what I write is true, it is true from my perspective. I have done my best to contextualize the situations during the analysis, but only to the extent the contextualization helps the reader to value the feelings expressed in the narrative. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) argued "the portraitist's reference to her own life

story does not reduce the reader's trust, it enhances it. It does not distort the responsibility of the researcher and the authenticity of the work, it gives them clarity" (p. 96).

Though I sincerely hope readers will experience verisimilitude from their reading of my work, there will invariably be times when my feelings or expressions of thoughts will differ from those who read the work. After all, not all teachers think and feel in lockstep with one another; the same must also be said for those in dual roles. I am asking, however, for my "readers to feel the truth of [my] stories and to become coparticipants, engaging the storyline morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 745; Richardson, 1994). "The goal is to encourage compassion and promote dialogue…the stories we write put us into conversation with ourselves as well as with our readers" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 748). I want my readers to view the work for what it is, one individual's account of experiencing tensions born from the combination of two roles and value it as one starting point from which to either plan for entry into a dual role or plan to make a policy wherein a dual role will be assigned to someone under their purview. As a final statement with respect to reliability and truth, I defer to Bochner (2000):

> I think it's the same judgement we make about any author or any character. Is the work honest or dishonest? Does the author take measure of herself, her limitations, her confusion, ambivalence, mixed feelings? Do you gain a sense of emotional reliability? Do you sense a passage through emotional epiphany to some communicated truth, not resolution per se, but some transformation from an old self to a new one? (p. 749; Rhett, 1997)

As such, I leave it to the readers to determine if the power of my stories is enough to give a sense of reliability and convince them of my truth.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Introduction

Within this chapter, I share the narrative of my experiences in the first year of my role as a Hybrid Teacher Leader (HTL) and my findings based on my analysis of the data through the lenses of Role Theory (Owens, 2004), Cultural Identities and Figured Worlds (Holland et al., 1998), and Imposter Syndrome (Clance & Imes, 1978; Sherman, 2013). Through this autoethnographic account of my first year in an HTL role, I seek to understand the following:

- As I reflect on the events and emotions of my work as an HTL in a high school and write my autoethnography, in what ways might I discover more about myself as a classroom teacher, a teacher leader, and a Hybrid Teacher Leader?
- How might my awareness of these discoveries assist me in my future work?
- How might my discoveries assist others in Hybrid Teacher Leader roles?
- In what ways might my discoveries inform the role expectations of those who manage Hybrid Teacher Leaders, or of the HTLs themselves?

I have chosen the methodology of autoethnography based on a realization of my own positionality in the HTL role. Though I am certainly not the only HTL within my school district, due to a variety of forces I am the only one who lived the experiences and emotions at the heart of my study. While previous studies have discussed the role of an HTL, none have examined it from an inside perspective and shared the emotional impact of the interplay between the academic coaching and classroom teaching elements of the position. As an autoethnography, my study will accomplish that task.

Simply stated, the data are my story. The story has been pieced together from materials written and collected during the first year of my time in an HTL role, which were preserved as artifacts to enhance my memory of the events and the impact of those events on my emotions. The data are a collection of journal entries—terse and infrequent, though good sources of the mood I was experiencing at the time of writing; email—saved in an email folder and retrieved when I realized they provided an excellent timeline of the way I became an HTL; and calendar entries—color-coded and packed with the events of my days, which helped me to see how my first year in the role unfolded which tell the story of how I came to be in a Hybrid Teacher Leader role, the training in which I participated for the role, specific events throughout the first year I was in the position, as well as the reflections I had after the news of the hybrid position's coming to an end. From the data, I have written vignettes which take me—and the reader—on a journey back in time to the situations and the circumstances of which my days were comprised in this first year. I have worked to explore my feelings and emotions and have written the vignettes with the aim of sharing them and learning from them. I have connected the vignettes with context to aid the reader (and myself) in the process of making meaning. The vignettes represent the actual events of my days, as well as the thoughts, feelings, and emotions I felt during the time. In many instances, what is shared is not flattering to me; I can only arrive at the truth by being honest and forcing myself to face the difficult realities. Only through discovery can I determine ways in which I can use what has happened to assist me in my future work; likewise, it is my hope my discoveries may also assist others in Hybrid Teacher Leader roles and those who will lead them as administrators. Readers will be able to feel the truth of the stories, and I invite the readers to consider their own experiences and feelings while sharing in my journey.

I have taken pains to shroud the others in my stories in a cloak of anonymity. Where titles of programs would be likely to identify the district or school in which the events occurred, a more generic term with a similar meaning has been used. Where names would be used, the prefix (Mr., Mrs., Ms.) are given along with a letter. Where the proper prefix would too easily lead to possible identification, I have altered it as well (for instance, an individual with the prefix Dr. could simply be referenced as Ms.). The letter is the first letter of the pseudonym I have given the individual. In this way, I am working to bring the focus to the events and feelings as I experienced them without bringing scrutiny upon those who were in my world at the time.

## My Story: How I Came to Be in a Hybrid Teacher Leader Role

What follows is an email to an academic coach colleague who could not attend an emergency meeting of all fully-released academic coaches, the position I held prior to the Hybrid Teacher Leader role:

> *Friday, January 22, 2016*
> *From: Lauriann Jones*
> *RE: Emergency All [Coaches] Meeting, January 2016*
>
> *I hope someone hasn't sent you a text about this yet; you're going to want to sit down for this one. The majority of the meeting was uneventful (I'll give you notes, but honestly, it's nothing you don't already know or have). But at the end, Ms. A. stood at the front of the room and announced that they are taking the leadership for the [coaching] program away from her—away from the whole leadership team, actually—for next year and they will not be on the hiring committee for the program going forward. It was devastating; we were all crying—I've never seen her cry before. Just last meeting we were so happy that she was going to be able to protect the cadre from any changes going forward, now everything is so up in the air. She didn't have any answers about the new job description or how the re-application process would look yet—it seems as if they are shutting them out of everything, which is really stupid because there isn't anyone else that has the amount of knowledge about the program as they do—they BUILT it! Anyway, I'll phone you later. But I wanted you to hear it as I heard it before someone else blabbed. TTYL*

I had been in the fully-released academic coaching program for three and a half years at this point. Although when I initially applied for the position, they stated it would only be for three years (based on the grant), the length of the contract was extended during my second year for those who were successful in the role and wanted to continue in the position. As a result of my successful first three years, I was invited to stay on in the role for a fourth year. At the beginning of the school year, the District Superintendent visited the cadre and told us how wonderful we were for the work we were doing; it was exciting to be recognized in this fashion by the new Superintendent, and I felt great about the upcoming school year—even though it was probably my last in the role. Then, a bit later in the school year, we had been told of the possibility of changes coming to the program including a new, more detailed job description our lead boss would write, as well as the opportunity to be in the role for as long as we chose to be there. This was fabulous news to me and gave me hope! I loved being an academic coach. It had its challenges like any other job, but because I had been in the position for almost four years (with three previous years at the same schools) I enjoyed a comfort level with the role. I knew the goals, who to call for help, and how to get my mentees on-board. I enjoyed the relationships I had built with my mentees and wanted to continue working with them in the next year. I also loved the schools where I had coached for the last three years; I hoped to be able to stay there as I had great working relationships with the principals and staff, knew the campuses, and cared about the faculty. So, when Ms. A. shared the news about the change in leadership and the re-application process in the January emergency meeting, I felt sucker punched. The fantasy future I had dreamed about was no longer clear.

The person to whom I sent the above email attempted to be a bit more optimistic. She thought we had a very good chance at a position ahead of us; we had been working in the

position for almost four years and few knew it better than we. In addition, there had been few who had applied over the last couple of years for the fully-released academic coaching positions, so it made sense we would be at the top of the list, and everything would continue as normal. I admit to being a more pessimistic person and I was not as certain as she all would work out well.

In the coming weeks I was offered information about the upcoming application and interview process. The district set up information sessions to explain the difference in job descriptions for both the new academic coaching and the Hybrid Teacher Leader positions (the academic coaching position was the one closest to my current role; the HTL position was a dual role, and it was new to us all). At first, I had been told I would not have to fill out an application to be considered for the new academic coaching positions since I already occupied a similar role. That relief was short-lived, as the change in supervision and job description required a new application.

> *Wednesday, March 9, 2016*
> *From: E.A.*
>
> *Dear Instructional Staff member,*
> *As we move forward to develop systems of support within our school sites for next year, the application window is now open for those who are interested in the [academic coach] (district based) and [Hybrid Teacher Leader] (school based at 59 pilot sites) positions. The application link is found below for your use. The application window will be open through Wednesday, March 23rd at 6:00 PM. The list of approved sites for the [Hybrid Teacher Leader] position is attached for your reference.*

The application was long and had some computer glitches, but I completed and submitted it on Monday, March 21, 2016. I was told to look in my email in the coming days to find the time and date of the panel interview.

A panel interview, also referenced as a "screening," consisted of between five and seven individuals from throughout the district and would include those in supervisory positions within

the program. I did not know ahead of time who was going to be there, but I did know who was not…Ms. A. and the rest of the team to which I currently answered. I had done three panel interviews prior to this one and had even served as one of the panel members on an assistant principal's interview in my previous school; I was a bit nervous—as would be normal for an interview—but I had been successful in the past and felt certain I would be again.

I looked several times a day for the email to show up in my inbox, but it did not arrive. Others I knew were getting their emails, and the panel interviews had already started.

> *Tuesday, March 29, 2016*
> *From: I.L.*
>
> *Hi All,*
> *Just a quick update. They are still scheduling screenings. She is going to send an email when she sends out the last batch, and asked that you contact me if you do not get an interview so I can let her know. She will check your status to figure out what's going on. So---no worrying!*

Again, relief flooded me; it was nerve-racking to wait, but at least I did not feel as if I was the only one. Then this arrived:

> *Thursday, March 31, 2016*
> *From: I.L.*
>
> *Hi all,*
> *She let me know today that the last batch of scheduling emails went out. If you did not receive an email with a date/time for screening, please contact her so she can look into the situation.*

Having never received a scheduling email, I quickly wrote out the following:

> *Thursday, March 31, 2016*
> *From: Lauriann Jones*
> *Hello Ms. H.,*
> *My name is Lauriann Jones, and I am currently a [fully-released academic coach]. I submitted my application for the new [academic coaching] and [HTL] positions on Monday 3/21/16, but I have not received an invitation for screening. I am curious to know if this is in error, or if I have not been approved for a*

*screening for some particular reason. Any information you can offer will be welcomed.*

I held my breath in anticipation of the response, which follows:

*Friday, April 1, 2016*

*A review of your application for [academic coach] and/or [Hybrid Teacher Leader] has qualified you for an interview.*

*INTERVIEW DATE: Thursday, April 7th*
*INTERVIEW TIME: 9:30 AM*

Apparently, my name had somehow been left off the list of current academic coaches and, as a result, I had not been given an interview slot along with the rest of my cadre. This information came word of mouth from I.L. at a regularly scheduled academic coaches' Friday meeting.

This would prove to be an important oversight, although I would not understand the ramifications until much later. I have since learned I was the last academic coach to be interviewed prior to the day on which the panel would make their recommendations for those going into the pool of academic coaches for the upcoming year. The pool would consist of all of those who interviewed and were qualified for a position, filled in order of their approval. So those who had interviewed first were higher on the pool list than those who interviewed later. After the new management compiled the list, they would be given the number of academic coaches who would be allowed into the cadre (based on the number of open positions in the school district, as well as the number of first year teachers who needed a second year of coaching) and would literally draw a line across the list. Those above the line were hired, while those below would remain in the pool.

Of course, I knew none of this at the time, and I waited anxiously to see if I would be placed on the pool list.

*Friday, April 8, 2016*
*From: A.O.*

*You have been placed into the applicant pool for [academic coach]. Again, congratulations!*

I got it! Despite the oversight for the interview, the interview went well, and I was accepted into the pool. I felt very hopeful. There would be another week of waiting before I was told whether I made the cut for the available academic coaching positions.

During this time, there was little other talk between fully-released academic coaches (like me) and fully-released classroom evaluators than what was going to happen with the academic coaching positions for the next year. The fully-released classroom evaluators had started as a program at the same time as the fully-released academic coaches; however, as the fully-released academic coaches worked with teachers who had under six months of teaching experience, the fully-released classroom evaluators used the Danielson rubric to observe and evaluate all teachers who were not in the new teacher academic coaching program. The fully-released classroom evaluators program was going to be disbanded altogether; they had the choice of applying for the academic coaching positions, the HTL positions, applying for another district position, or returning to a school campus to either teach or be an administrator (educational level and position availability permitting). There were as many of the evaluators looking for academic coaching positions as there were existing academic coaches; this resulted in competition and more than just a bit of animosity between the two groups. As I awaited the news of whether I would be an academic coach for the next school year, I asked others, "Did you hear anything yet?" The response was always, "Not yet." It seemed as if I was hungry for information, but it did not seem to be coming as rapidly as I would have wished. There was also a great deal of

misinformation based on conjecture. The lack of official information did not help dispel the gossip.

During this time, I also thought it important to shore up my options just in case I was not offered an academic coaching position. I contacted the school from which I came prior to being hired as a fully-released academic coach. They were eager to have me come back to them and teach Freshmen English, as well as to be the department head of the English Department. I admit I was not excited about this prospect; it felt as if it would be a backward step. Elizabeth Munroe compares this kind of thinking to the game of *Chutes and Ladders*. If you are winning, you are climbing the ladder; if you are losing, you are stepping on a snake's head and sliding down its tail (2014). I had been out of the school for four years and was not eager to return to classroom teaching, which seemed to me to be a step back from where I had been. If nothing else, I wanted to have the opportunity to move forward at another school even if I could not be an academic coach. One of the schools where I was currently academic coaching was hoping I would continue to be in the program so I could work with their new HTLs and the leadership team to raise the bar of excellence for all teachers. It was an exciting prospect and I looked forward eagerly to the work I would do there—if only I could be hired as an academic coach, that is. I asked if I could be one of the HTLs at the school if the academic coach position did not pan out; the principal had unfortunately already offered both of the HTL spots to others but was extremely optimistic about the likelihood of my being offered an academic coaching position. She had given me such great references; she could not imagine I would not be top on the list. I wished I had her optimism.

Finally, the day arrived on which I would learn if I was to be offered a continuing position as an academic coach, or if I would need to determine another path for myself. Three

times a year, I and my fellow academic coaches "swapped" schools and evaluated each other's mentees on the Danielson rubric. The purpose was to give an unbiased assessment of how each mentee was progressing and to give the mentee the opportunity to experience the evaluation process as it would happen each year during their careers. I was in the final "swap" period of the school year; that day, I would start out writing up the evaluations from the previous day's observations, and then I would move into an afternoon of classroom observations. But as I arrived that morning, all I could think about was the academic coaching position and whether I would get the email I dreamed of receiving. As I arrived at the media center office, which was my home base while I was "swap evaluating," I took note of two fully-released evaluators in the room. They had received their emails and were happily chatting about the academic coaching positions in which they would be serving the next year. I sat at the desk, took out my laptop, and signed into my email. I skimmed through the junk mail, "swap" email, and other email—about which I currently did not care—to see the one I had been hoping—believing—I would see. There was no such email. I knew it then, but I was advised to be optimistic. As the morning wore on however, I knew I was not assigned to be an academic coach in the next school year.

The next day, the following email appeared in my inbox:

*Tuesday, April 19, 2016*
*From: I.L.*

> *Many of you have reached out and I wanted to share the most recent information I have about the academic coach offers.*
>
> *According to A.O., offers went out by email yesterday based on current needs. If you did not receive an offer, you are still considered part of the academic coach pool for the upcoming school year. As additional units become available, anybody in the pool could be called upon and made an offer, and it would be up to you to accept or decline. There is no definitive timeline on when these offers could be made.*

It would be nearly impossible to describe the stew of emotions within me at this time. I was, of course, disappointed. But more than that, I was angry. People who did not have the experience to be an academic coach, who had not done the job, were being hired over me. I had successfully navigated the role for four years and had been considered by my peers, my supervisors—and yes, myself—as a sure selection for the academic coaching position going forward. It was frustrating to see others, who were less deserving in my estimation, happy they were selected when I was not.

During the time I was sulking, those who had been placed into the Hybrid Teacher Leader pool were busy interviewing at schools and accepting offers. While the pool for HTLs was also large, there were two positions available at each of the schools piloting the program (there were 59 schools on the pilot program list). On Thursday, April 21, I inquired as to whether I was able to apply for HTL positions and I was told I was "definitely eligible." By this point, however, many of the most desirable schools had already offered positions to their favorite candidates (as the pool for HTLs had been open for hire since Friday, April 8, the same day I had been placed in the academic coaching pool). There were few schools left with open positions; many of the schools with open positions had a history of being less desirable either for their location, their demographics, or their climate/culture. Given how few selections there were, I assumed I would not be hired for an HTL position, and I would be teaching full-time in the following year.

I received a message on Thursday, April 21, from a middle school principal who had HTL positions open. My inexperience with middle school took me out of contention for the position. Though there were other schools to which I inquired, I was told repeatedly their HTL positions were already filled. As I had been offered the opportunity to return to my previous

school to teach English full-time and be their department head, I had all but given up on receiving any other offers.

On May 11, at 5:16 P.M. a former academic coach colleague of mine, Ms. Y, sent me a text message. In the previous school year, she had taken a position as an English department head and writing coach at a high school; her high school needed an additional HTL, and she inquired about my availability. We talked by phone, and I sent her my resume and cover letter, following up with the principal of the school with those documents as well. I received a phone call the next morning offering an interview for later that afternoon. I arrived near the end of the school day and spoke with my friend/department head for a few minutes, hoping to get a feel for the school and for the needs of the English department in specific. After only a few minutes speaking, we moved to the principal's office and the formal interview. By the end of our time together, the principal offered me the position and welcomed me aboard as an HTL.

Despite the heartache of not being selected as an academic coach for the next school year, I was both thrilled and relieved to be selected for the HTL position. Although I did not know much about the school other than what I had read on the demographics page and what I had heard in rumor, I was determined to do well in the position. My confidence in my ability to academically coach teachers of all subject areas to improve their teaching skill allowed me to be confident in half of my new position. The other half of my position would be teaching 9$^{th}$ and 10$^{th}$ grade English—neither of which I had ever taught. Although I was confident in my teaching skills, I knew I would need to brush up on the curriculum and plan the courses over the summer to be prepared.

The teaching portion of the role was of most concern to me. Teaching takes a huge effort of planning, grading, and training outside of the actual classroom teaching. Though academic

coaches planned their week, sourced documents, participated in training, and reflected on mentoring sessions, the work was not as rigorous as that of managing those things in addition to teaching three classrooms full of students. In addition to not knowing the curriculum, I had not been the teacher of record in a classroom for four years; I suspected I would be a bit rusty. Had I read the work of Steinbacher-Read and Powers (2011), I would have known it was normal to experience, "a variety of emotions, ranging from excitement at the thought of returning to the classroom to sadness or resentment about losing the identity of coach" (p. 69). Instead, I chastised myself for wistfully thinking about how much better my upcoming year would have been had I been selected as an academic coach.

## Training to be a Hybrid Teacher Leader

As with any new job, I was required to attend training sessions designed to prepare me for the task ahead. As I had been solely focused on remaining an academic coach, I had not given too much thought to the Hybrid Teacher Leader role. I had so many questions! A technique I had been taught in the academic coaching program and passed along to my mentees was to make a list of the questions I had prior to the training, then attend the training and get as many of those answers as possible from the original content, then be certain to ask the questions left unanswered by the end of the session(s). My list was long and was comprised of mostly logistical questions. What follows are just a few of my questions: To whom do I report? Who decides the teachers with whom I will work? How will I account for my time? Can my time be taken away and for what reason? I took my list to the first day of training, hoping for clarity.

*July 11, 2016*

*The room was awash in the buzz of combined conversations as I entered the multipurpose room at the high school. I have been to this building before, but*

*never this room; as the pre-training time wore on, the room filled with those who would be my colleagues—though not at the same building and not all at the same level. In this room, we were a mixture of elementary, middle, and high school teachers with one connection—we were new Hybrid Teacher Leaders. I saw a few friendly faces—former academic coaches like myself—and gravitated towards them even though we were not going to be at the same school. Our discussions slid back to what we knew of the new academic coaches and their training, wishing we, too, would have been chosen for their cadre as opposed to this one. At that, I moved away and found the HTL who would be working with me at my school. I knew her from a Ph.D. class we both attended, and I hoped we would have a good working relationship at the school as well. She had been at the school for years prior (she helped to open the school during its inaugural year), and I saw her as a valuable source of information about the culture of the school and its teachers. Our conversation was cut short as the room was called to order. As the training began, I looked over the list of topics and my heart sank. The coursework was comprised of sessions on coaching technique and language—all topics with which I was already familiar with my background as an academic coach. As the training packets were dispersed, I was taken aback; I had seen the bulk of these training materials before! Much of what was in the packet was the same as I had used as I was training to become an academic coach—in fact, they didn't even attempt to hide the logo from the company our district had contracted to help build the academic coaching program years ago. I met the eyes of my fellow former academic coaches in the room, and we exchanged dismayed looks.*

Over the next three days, I worked hard to stay focused as the material was a truncated version of the previous training in which I had participated. None of it answered my questions. At the end of the session, I attempted to get answers to my questions and found the answers had a similar response: "Ask your principal. Your principal makes the decisions." From the groans of frustration after each such response, I could tell others had the same questions and were not satisfied with the answers. After training ended, I found I had no more clarity than I had prior to the beginning of the training sessions. I looked forward to gaining more clarity in the coming weeks, as our pre-planning for the school year started on August 2.

## My First Year as a Hybrid Teacher Leader: Fall 2016

The first morning at my new school was filled with the normal anticipatory jitters. I had picked my outfit carefully that day, as my fellow HTL and I had been asked at the end of the week prior to make a short presentation for the faculty on the first day of pre-planning on the role of the Hybrid Teacher Leader. As neither of us HTLs had any great understanding of the program, we relied heavily on the PowerPoint offered by the program at the end of our training as a foundation of our remarks.

I stepped onto campus and followed those who arrived before me into the cafeteria, where a welcome-back-to-school breakfast was being served. I had eaten before leaving home, not wanting to mess up my clothing with a food-related accident first thing in the morning; I regretted it, though, as the breakfast looked and smelled delicious. I opted for some fresh fruit and a cup of coffee, and I met up with Ms. Y, the longtime friend who made me aware of this position and now my department head. She introduced me around to the table comprised primarily of English and reading teachers. I mostly listened as the conversations ran from vacations, to children, to the upcoming school year. I noticed my fellow HTL and waved a "hello," but she did not come over, opting instead to sit with her mathematics colleagues.

After breakfast, we moved to the auditorium for the beginning of the day's meetings. I looked at the itinerary and found the planned HTL introduction would be near the end of the meeting. The principal and the assistant principals consumed most of the meeting time, introducing the new faculty members and previewing changes to the established routines. I had some jitters with anticipation of making my remarks; since I am also a training specialist, I present frequently, but my desire to impress my new colleagues—or at least not make a fool of myself—made me shaky with nerves. The presentation went as well as could be expected; the

PowerPoint worked, I did not stumble over my words, and my fellow HTL and I worked well together—despite a lack of rehearsal. Though the teachers were polite, most just wanted to get to their classrooms and begin setting up. At the completion of our remarks, the meeting ended, and we were all dismissed to our classrooms for the remainder of the day.

In my past four years as an academic coach, pre-planning week was an exciting time. We academic coaches would meet in room 102 down at the district offices, catch up with one another, eat some breakfast, and chat away until we were called to order. We would have an icebreaker exercise and then begin some training pertaining to changes for the upcoming school year. Then we would receive our school assignments and spend the next days at our schools, getting to know the teachers and the campuses. I would help my new teachers set up their rooms for success, talking through the rationale of different seating arrangements. I would connect the new mentees to the individuals who could help them gather supplies, books, and everything from paper for their bulletin boards to bandages for boo-boos to stow away in their desks. My mentees and I bonded during this time, and most appreciated the help I offered.

Now I was the teacher needing to set up the room. As I was new to the school, I did not have all of the answers. In fact, I felt as if I had as many questions as a new person! Though I had not read it at the time, Grodzki predicted this stressor when saying, "The more elements of change a newcomer faces, the more adjustments and sensemaking is required of the individual" (2011, p. 22). Had I returned to teaching in the school I had left four years earlier, I would not have faced as many unknowns as I did now. I had so many questions, and I did not always love the answers. Supplies? There was a cabinet with a few pens and highlighters; I would need to purchase items like staplers, tape dispensers, and paper on my own. Books? On back order; they *should* arrive before school starts. Paper for my bulletin board? Not supplied at this school; I

would need to purchase my own. Extra bandages for boo-boos? I received one pair of latex gloves and five bandages after completing the bloodborne pathogens training; we were invited to send our students to the nurse should we happen to use our five allotted bandages (it turns out I used them all on the first day of school, as my students wore new shoes which gave them blisters). An order for more bandages went on my shopping list.

The largest obstacle to setting up my room was the assignment of a roommate. Neither of us had been told we were sharing a room, and she was quite upset by it. I can still hear her words: “This isn’t going to work!” She was heavily pregnant with her first child (she would go on to deliver in October) and was taken aback when she learned her first three classes of the day would be in our room, but she would have to move to another room after lunch for her final three periods. I was much less inconvenienced; my duties as an HTL would have me out and about in the morning, so my planning desk in the teachers’ planning area would be fine for me as a home base in the morning. After lunch, I would teach in the room my roommate vacated. After helping her to advocate to those in power for a different situation—which was unsuccessful—I set about to make sure she saw me as an ally instead of a hindrance. The seating was arranged in the style she preferred. I moved furniture in the room (cabinets, bookshelves, teacher desk) to areas she requested. The posters she brought were hung on the walls at her direction (I would not “allow” her to get up on a chair to put up posters—not in her condition). Since I had not had a classroom over the past four years, I did not take offense (although not everything was to my liking). But we made it work, and by the end of the first week we were talking more freely and beginning to be friends.

The following days of pre-planning were filled with meetings, training, and more time in our rooms to set up. No matter how hard we worked, the room always needed more work to

make it right for the open house at the end of the week and the first day of classes the following week. There was so much to do, but so little time out of meetings to do it all. I spent many hours after school officially ended working on both the room and on plans for my classes—plans made more difficult by a lack of textbooks. I decided instead to organize my flash drive. Now when I plugged the drive into my laptop, the folder labels revealed how I viewed my reality: Coaching World; My Personal World; My Professional World; Teaching World; HTL World; Training World; PHD World. The mindless process of sifting files into their appropriate headings made me feel better, even if it did not really help me get my work done.

On Friday of the first week of pre-planning, I attended a breakfast at the Chamber of Commerce meant to welcome the new teachers. While this was one of the fun things I did with my new mentees when I was an academic coach, I was less enthusiastic about going now—which was sad because it would be my last time in attendance at the event. Yes, the food was wonderful—as always—and the bag of supplies given as a welcome gift were much appreciated, but I felt awkward. I was not a new teacher—though I was new to my school—and the new teachers would have their own mentor with whom to work, so I really did not have the need to be there networking with them. I did, however, get to see some of my former-academic coach friends who were new at their schools this year. We gravitated together and commiserated over our lost jobs. A normally fun event left me sad instead, and I returned to the school with a heavy heart.

At 5:00 P.M. that evening, we had an open house to welcome students and parents to the school. My roommate and I had straightened the room as much as possible, hoping to make a good first impression with the students and the parents. The evening was a bit of a comedy and a bonding moment for my roommate and me. As students came through the doorway, we needed

to guess to which teacher they were assigned as the students did not have familiarity with either of us. At first, we thought we would find it easy to distinguish between my Freshmen English students and her seniors; later, we laughed at our mistaken guesses when older-looking first-year students or younger-looking fourth-year students came through the door.

*August 8th, 2016 (data day)*

> *Today I heard that my new school will likely be a C again this year—at least it's not a D. We are REALLY LOW in reading and writing. It will be a tough year ahead. This new position has my head reeling. When I was a teacher only, I looked at the data for my students and made plans to improve. When I was an academic coach only, I looked at the data to see how I would help my mentees plan their classes for improvement—and I only needed to focus on the data that my mentees would need. No history teacher this year? Then I didn't need to pay as much attention to the American History data. But now I have to look at the data twice—once as a teacher, focusing in on the needs of my students, and once as an HTL, looking at all of the data (because I don't know who will ask for help yet) and focusing on the big picture to help the school improve. There was never enough time during pre-planning as it was, but I have even less time now. When I want to be setting up my classroom and planning my opening week lessons, I am pulled into a meeting as an HTL, or the principal, or other academic coaches. I have been staying late everyday so far and my classroom looks like a bomb went off. At least my roommate and I are getting along better. I can't believe it's only day 3…it feels like a month. I'm so tired.*

Pre-planning ended and students arrived for their first day of school. My diary entries from the first two days are practically nonexistent; those comments written were more like reminders of what I still needed to do for the next day. I can remember being overwhelmed by teaching almost immediately. Planning lessons, making seating charts, learning names; my first three periods—designated for the academic coaching portion of my job—were spent planning for my classes rather than helping others. But to be fair, no one had asked for help yet.

*August 12th, 2016*

> *Third day of teaching. Although I have only 3 classes, the classes are all at the 25-student mark or higher. Admin. promises to keep class sizes at 25, but it'll have to wait until all the students have enrolled. I have 2 classes of freshmen and 1 of honors sophomores. I have a really good idea of what to do with*

*freshmen…a few of my most recent mentees were freshmen teachers. But sophomores not so much.*

*I haven't had any takers so far with HTL. I know it's early, but I haven't seen anyone even interested. Although teachers talk with me during lunch and in the halls, it's teacher talk—not HTL talk. No one is trying to improve from what they say, they are just expressing their frustrations. I am frustrated, too. I have too few chairs in my room for all the students and there don't appear to be more desks anywhere on campus. They ran out of textbooks for the freshmen, so I can't assign books until we have enough. Also, I need to create everything from scratch and make endless copies—eventually, they will crack down on the copier, but that's a matter for another day.*

As the days wore on, many of the situations did not improve. Class sizes did not come down to 25 until after the 20-day count. (On the 20th day of school, we count and report the number of students for funding purposes. New teachers can be hired at that point, providing some relief for overcrowding.) It took two weeks to get enough desks in the classroom to accommodate all the students; until then, students rotated sitting in the teacher desk, at the computer desk, and at a table along the front of the room. Additional books would not arrive until the first week of October, so making and copying the lessons was a daily activity. Administration was politely asking the teachers to conserve copies; students were not to be given individual copies, even though interacting with the text by marking the paper is a best practice for raising reading levels, as suggested in the pre-planning training we had at the beginning of the school year.

As an HTL, my schedule provided the first three class periods of each day to meet with teachers to provide academic coaching. As it was up to teachers to elect to work with me, I was attempting to get to know the staff and offer them my services. During my three class periods of HTL time each day, I acquainted myself with the campus, the staff, and the faculty. Each week there was a leadership meeting, but I was unable to attend because it was in the afternoon and the administration would not agree to cover my class so I could attend. I rarely saw my fellow HTL

at the school. Though she was just upstairs, she was teaching when I was in my HTL periods, and I was teaching when she was in her HTL periods. She had Ph.D. classes after school and left shortly after the last bell. I rarely received email messages from her and most of my messages went unanswered. Any information or leads she might have to make my job easier remained with her.

*September 16, 2016*

*As I enter through the doors of the Instructional Services Center on my way to a monthly HTL meeting, I cast my glance around the familiar surroundings. Although I only come here in the morning once a month now, at one time I spent every Friday in this building for my academic coach training and meetings. In that time, the academic coaches would come together from their different sites, bringing both food and data to share. Lively discussion was always part of the Friday meetings, and whatever troubles I had when I arrived could be shared and workshopped so I had a plan for the following week. It was so productive and so helpful that it was a joy to put on my schedule each week.*

*I call a "Hello!" to the ladies at the reception desk; they know me well and do not ask for my ID or make me get a printed badge, even though I am no longer an academic coach. It feels nice to belong…I have not felt that in my new school yet.*

*As I enter room 102, one of the largest meeting rooms in the building, I glance around at the few individuals who have arrived before me. As time passes, I note that there are not many entering, and the room is still really empty. I sit and review the agenda for today. Another packed schedule. Where is the pre-arranged time for group discussion? Where is the "problem-posed-problem-solved" session so familiar to us academic coaches? I wonder if they do not want us to speak with one another…and, if so, why?*

*As the meeting begins, the room is still only a quarter full. I think back to the first meetings we had over the summer; a packed room, an excited buzz of discussion and the familiar talk of friends who have not gotten together in a while. Where did that go? I have so many questions. How am I ever going to find out if others feel the same way I do?*

I had so been looking forward to meeting with other HTLs to get some assistance. I was feeling isolated and frustrated, and those feelings were not conducive to making a successful HTL program at my school. I was an academic coach in need of my own academic coach. Yet the meeting offered me nothing new in the way of strategies to employ, and we had little to no

time to communicate with one another to work on problem solving. I rushed back to the school after the meeting with nerves feeling more frazzled than when it started.

*September 15, 2016*

*The blessed bell sounds the end of class for the day and my second English I class gushes through the door to join the flood of teenage humanity in the hallway. Holding back a sigh, I manage to murmur, "Have a great day," in a lackluster tone, knowing I should say something pleasant to send them on their way. It had been a difficult class; had I a dollar for every curse word my students produced that period, I would be well on my way to a healthy retirement fund. Two young men nearly fought; though the reasons for the quarrel were still unclear, I knew only that desks were shoved, voices were raised, and bystanders exhibited far more enthusiasm for the ensuing brawl than I had ever seen from them in my nearly two months of instruction. As I scanned my memory of the class, I could not isolate a single moment of true learning. The class period—and my instruction—had been a failure.*

*It was not my first class to be deemed thus, but there had been far too many of them recently. Even more disturbing to me was a glance at the calendar I had hung beside my desk to remind me of the upcoming academic coaching meetings I had scheduled. I need not have bothered to look today; I did not have an appointment scheduled. A little voice from way down deep whispered, "Your classes are the reason you don't have coaching appointments. They know you cannot control your kids. They know your students are not successful. Why would they want advice from you?"*

The teaching portion of my job was not progressing as well as I would have liked. I had worried I might be rusty, but there were times I felt as if I had not been taught the skills I needed to teach the students to whom I had been assigned. Off-task behavior was frequent, and I did not seem to have the skill to bring them back to the lesson. Part of the issue was my unfamiliarity with the texts in the course; I had not taught them before, so I was always just one step ahead of the students with the reading and analysis of the material. Although I was formatively assessing in the classroom, I still had an unfinished pile of work on my desk needing grading and feedback. Once graded, I would need to enter the scores into the gradebook system for communication to students, parents, and administration. The grading, data entry, reading, and

planning tasks fell to after school time, taking hours away from my personal life. My work-life balance was nonexistent. Another part of the problem stemmed from a week of bereavement leave I had taken at the end of September. I had been assured by Ms. Y. I did not need to plan my lessons during the bereavement time. I had left some cursory plans for three of the days to let my colleagues know where I was in the content; I was told they would do the rest. When I arrived back a week later, I came back to students who had done next to nothing during the time I had been gone. They had not continued in their reading and had not completed any work in their now-assigned books. They had not been following the classroom rules, as evidenced by the number of phones out on desks and the number of headphones/earphones on during class time. It was as if they had been on vacation while I was gone and resented my presence when I came back. It took so much effort to bring them back on-task and my frustration level was off the charts. My call list—comprised of parent names, phone numbers, and dates/times of the phone calls and emails—demonstrated a pronounced increase in attempts at communication with parents during this time, though many resulted in messages left without a reply from the parents. Students knew I had tried, however, and some acted out more often after a phone call or email home. I still did not reach out often to the administration. I did not want to show them I did not know what I was doing when trying to get the students to behave in my classes. Late at night—instead of sleeping—I poured over my training materials from classroom management courses, hoping I had missed something which might prove to be successful. But nothing worked as it was suggested it might.

*October 20, 2016*

> *Today is the ninth day in a row I have proctored an exam during my HTL time. Two full weeks without an opportunity to academically coach anyone. I understand I am a logical choice for the proctoring assignment; I don't have morning classes, so no students are left without a teacher and no other teachers*

*are inconvenienced by having to spend their planning time covering a class or proctoring a test. But I am missing so many opportunities to work with the teachers. My days are on repeat. I proctor, teach my classes, and attend meetings. But I am unable to do what makes me most satisfied. I really miss being an academic coach.*

Luckily, the seemingly endless days of proctoring did end shortly after. However, new obstacles arose to finding my foothold with the faculty. School activities such as picture day, club day, *Challenge Day*, and PSAT day all came with alternative schedules and no opportunity to do the academic coaching portion of my job.

The October HTL meeting came and went with little change other than the awareness there were fewer people there than in the September meeting and July training. I was beginning to wonder if there was a way to get out of going, too. My frustration levels grew with a program which did not seem to be working and with people in authority who appeared to be ignoring the signs of some deeply frustrated and overwhelmed HTLs.

*November 1, 2016 (make-up picture day)*

*I cried in Ms. Y's office today. She is a former-academic coach, too, so she understands my frustration. No HTL appointments, the students are going crazy, and I am just so unhappy. One of my students cursed at me and flipped a desk because I told him to go for make-up pictures. Why does everything need to be a battle? I hate to write referrals on students or have them taken out from the classes—that's the part that really upset me most today. I don't think I was imagining the look on the assistant principal's face as he took the student from the room. I'm supposed to be this big hotshot coach from the district, and I can't even get a student to go to get a picture taken without a fight. Ms. Y says they understand—that they don't think anything bad. I don't think she's right.*

Based on my concerns, my department head thought it might be a good idea for me to participate in *Challenge Day*. *Challenge Day* is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to build empathy and compassion in diverse communities, particularly in schools. The *Challenge Day* events are highly emotional and help students and teachers dig into issues which may be

holding them back from being open, empathetic, and connected. Ms. Y. suggested I might learn more about some of the students with whom I was having difficulty. She further thought the time might help me to be more empathetic with students who come from homes and situations I have not yet experienced. I did go, and I found the experience to be moving. There were tears shed as students and teachers heard words and phrases describing events which occur in peoples' lives and "crossed the line" when those words and phrases had resonance in their own lives. I left with a renewed sense of compassion, and I hoped it would help me to deal with the misbehavior some of the students shared in the classroom.

*November 16, 2016*

*Since the beginning of the school year, I have been having a great deal of difficulty with one student in particular. He is a senior, who has been placed into one of my freshman classes because he didn't pass it four years ago when he was a freshman. Guidance was hoping to catch him up; it was going to be a challenge for a couple of reasons. First, he doesn't read or write well, and has not passed his reading or writing benchmark exams. Second, his GPA is under 1.0. Until I came to this school, I don't think I ever taught a student whose GPA was under a 1.0; if you had asked me, I wouldn't have thought it possible.*

*At any rate, the worst part is that he is a very hurt young man who tends to try to make everyone else in his orbit hurt as well. I have looked into his cumulative folder. It seems he is in an abusive household and his mother is drug addicted. He doesn't have a relationship with his father, and he had been sent to foster care on two previous occasions when his mother was incarcerated. On both occasions, he was returned to his mother's care after she served her time. His behavior has been worse lately, as his mother is back in court and may be incarcerated once again. The student is now past the age of being placed in foster care but will literally be out in the world on his own if she is jailed again. I feel so much for him, and I want to help him, but he is making it very difficult.*

*Today, he walked into class hitting the freshmen already sitting in their seats as he made his way to the back of the classroom (not his seat—his seat is near the front). One of the students who was hit began to cry because the hit was hard; the student who hit him is over six feet tall and approximately 200 pounds. I dealt with the crying student and offered to send him to the nurse; that was refused, and he sat and continued to sniffle as I went back to speak with my challenging student. When I arrived at the back of the room, he was quite belligerent; he emitted a string of curses. When I asked if he could sit quietly in class and do his work today, he and told me to go "F" myself. I had been told to contact the administration at any point if this student became uncontrollable—I*

*considered hitting others and cursing at me to be something uncontrollable for this class period.*

*When the secretary for student affairs heard the name of the student to be removed from class to the office or ISS, she sent a veritable army. Two administrators, two deputies, and the student success coach all arrived at my door. The student was given the opportunity to leave the classroom with just a verbal request; when he refused, the others came in to forcibly remove him. He held onto the desk and resisted, crying and calling out, "Ms. Jones. Don't make me go!" I came back to speak with him again, hoping he might respond to me this time. He grabbed my arm and held it tightly, digging in his nails. He cried out, "No! Don't make me go!" My heart broke. The deputy released the hold on my arm and the group lifted the student by the chair and removed both chair and student from the room. I have bruises on my arm and his nails cut my skin; I was asked if I wanted to press charges. I thought it was a ludicrous question. I just want ALL of my students to be safe; I was hoping to have peace for the rest of the students in the class, as they don't deserve to be hit and hear curses. But I don't want the students to have a record based on their behavior—behavior I clearly can't control—in my classroom.*

*Based on the follow-up, I don't believe he will return to my class. He has had multiple offenses each school year and doesn't appear to be on-track for graduation. So, he is probably being sent to night school for his GED.*

He did not return to class. I am not really sure what happened to him. I think about him often and wonder what I should have done differently or if it was always out of my hands.

Before I knew it, Thanksgiving week arrived. While I was thrilled to be away from work for an entire week, I was exhausted and had so much work to do over the break to catch up. I tried to focus on relaxation and rest during the week, but the grading and planning beckoned me from the bag near the front door.

There were merely three weeks after Thanksgiving break before Winter Break. Even though they had only had a week off, students came back to school as if it were the first day of the school year; they needed reminders of the rules and provided a variety of disruptive behaviors to both frustrate me and take the class off-task. Like most teachers, I was overwhelmed with cramming in the last of the content before the end-of-term exams. In addition to grading the last of the work and entering the scores into the grading program to tabulate the

end of quarter and semester grades, I needed to attend meetings and training at which I was urged to think of next term and to begin planning immediately.

I did not have a single academic coaching opportunity during the period between Thanksgiving and Winter break. In fact, in looking over my calendar for the Fall term of 2016, I had been available to academically coach only 33 of the 90 school days, with only 6 of those days reserved for appointments with specific teachers. The balance of the time had been taken in proctoring (14 days), meetings (7 days), planning for and conducting schoolwide training (5 days), various school-related activities—such as assemblies, picture day, guidance programming, and the like—(17 days), hurricane days (2 days), end of the term exam days—which are half days with two exams before student dismissal—(4 days), and 8 days taken for personal appointments and a short leave to attend a funeral.

I was quite unhappy with the outcome of my semester in the English teaching portion of my position as well. I had found teaching my students to be exceedingly difficult. Many of my Freshmen English students had not passed an English class since fifth grade; they would unfortunately continue that streak during this term. They often had poor academic habits, refusing to do both homework and classwork. Their language was often inappropriate for the classroom and fights broke out at least once per week. Carefully planned lessons, meant to be engaging and to target the specific needs of the students, fell apart within minutes when particular students did not want to play along. My neighboring teachers would tell me, “Things will be okay!” as I stood at the door in the hallway during passing. They had heard the chaos in my room through the paper-thin walls during the class period before. Ironically, sometimes they attempted to give me advice; other times they commiserated with no ideas on how to help. I spent as much time as possible attempting to communicate with the parents of the most difficult

students, soliciting their assistance with their children. Some parents were kind, but unhelpful at resolving the situation. Some parents did not return the calls and the behavior continued or escalated. At the end of the first semester, the overall averages for each of my three classes were a dismal 66.4%, 60%, and 62%.

The term ended in frustration and dejection with both of my roles.

Winter break is often a transformational time, when teachers have the opportunity to sleep in, spend time with family, eat good meals, and engage in activities they have not had the chance to do in months. In 2016, Winter break was ten days long, but with weekends it was a full sixteen days. During that time, I slept in most days, trying to catch up on sleep I had been missing the whole term with my school day 5:00 A.M. wake-up time. My mom and I took time to travel, getting away for a few days to the east coast of Florida.

## My First Year as a Hybrid Teacher Leader: Spring 2017

I returned to school in January with a renewed enthusiasm. I started my classes with a reminder of the rules and a preview of the term's activities. I also began setting up appointments to see teachers, as I had promised myself I would do a better job of gaining entry into teacher's classrooms this term. The first week back, I had a setback—an indication of what was to come later in the term. I had been assigned to proctor the make-up semester exams during my HTL time, requiring appointments with teachers to be rescheduled to the next week. However, after those two days, the rest of my January HTL time was much more optimistic. I was invited to a social studies literacy training to help incorporate specific reading strategies into social studies curriculum. I attended an academic coaches' meeting to help coordinate plans among the academic coaching staff. I participated in a week of data chats (a practice of reviewing a portion

of data from progress monitoring assessments, determining areas for improvement, discussing strategies to facilitate improvement, and beginning lesson plans using those strategies) with a number of English department staff (I was only able to participate in the morning data chats during my HTL time, though I did have my own data chat in the afternoon on one of the days). I was asked to present at the Instructional Leadership Team cross-content meeting, and I team-taught with a teacher who had asked for help incorporating more active learning strategies with his students. It seemed as if I was finally fitting in, and the staff was beginning to accept both my skills and my willingness to be of assistance.

*January 12, 2017*

> *A quick note today because I am so busy. I started with data chats for HTL, then moved on to reading a portion of Romeo & Juliet with my freshmen. I think they are going to like the story; at least they liked the beginning which starts with a brawl in the marketplace. I hope they don't only like it because there was a fight! Either way, it's nice to have their attention and to feel as if we are getting something accomplished. Another busy day of data chats tomorrow morning as well—so things are good in HTL world, too. It feels good to have turned a corner with the staff! Off to grading and planning.*

Despite some initial difficulty with classroom management returning from Winter break, my teaching was doing better during this time as well. My students were reading longer pieces (*Romeo & Juliet* for Freshmen English, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* for the sophomores). I had always been successful when I could help engross students in a story, and my students were interested in the material we were reading. I spent a great deal more time doing read-alouds with my students than what I would have liked; my students were at various reading levels, with about half of each of my classes of Freshmen English students at a level 1 or 2 in reading (the levels were based on FSA testing and progress monitoring). More than one of my students were assessed to be at a first-grade reading level. All of this made it difficult to assign independent

reading which was not for pleasure. A great deal of our instructional time was spent listening to and reading along with an audio of the literature so students could hear good readers presenting the material. As both stories were interesting, students settled in to listen—and some read along, with prompting. When it came time to analyze the work and discuss it in groups, many of the off-task behaviors began again. This was frustrating to me, but the data helped me to be more understanding and I pushed forward with doing the best I could with the students. But it was not lost on me the suggestions I made during data chats and team-planning were easier said than done. During the frustrating times of misbehavior and lack of progress, I struggled with my own credibility as a teacher.

When the Sophomore English teachers wanted to join together for a planning session, I attended as both an academic coach and as a teacher of tenth grade students. Again, I felt torn between the two roles. While the academic coaching side of my experience made suggestions about strategies, quoted research, and offered suggestions, the teacher side of my experience saw the potential pitfalls of implementing the same strategies with my actual students. I could not be convinced by research a strategy would work when I had experienced so many past failures. I saw the wary expressions on the faces of the other teachers as well; they, too, had been burned by strategies predicated on students being academically prepared and well-behaved. During these meetings, I struggled with my own credibility as both a teacher and an academic coach.

I also noticed a disturbing lack of follow-up appointments with teachers after our initial meetings. The meetings had been set up in conjunction with another academic coach, who had been tasked by the administration to conduct the data chats, the training, and the planning sessions (so these meetings were not optional on the part of the teachers). However, after her portion was complete, I had trouble with turning the initial meeting into an ongoing schedule of

classroom visits and reflection/planning sessions (meetings which were optional and not at the behest of administration). In my previous role as an academic coach, my mentees were required to meet with me twice each week—once for classroom observation and once for data reflection and planning. It was a routine my mentees needed in the beginning of their careers because they were so new and realized early on they needed my support. Later in the school year, as the new teacher was growing and getting more ideas from training sessions they attended as part of their new teacher program, they began to bring more to the discussions and had their own ideas about strategies they would like to try. Our discussions became decidedly less one-sided and more a true partnership. Many of my mentees commented at the end of the school year how much our weekly meetings helped to grow their practice; but to a person, at the beginning of the school year none had felt as if twice weekly meetings were needed or even rational. They only began meeting with me and continued to do so because they were required by the program.

Teachers who met with me now agreed to do so only when required, which was infrequently the case. The HTL program was built with the idea of teacher autonomy. Even if the teacher had received feedback from the administration indicating the need for assistance in the areas of planning, data interpretation, assessment, classroom management, classroom discussion techniques, or any of the other data points of an observation, the teacher had the autonomy to decide whether to engage in training and academic coaching. While the initial meetings in January were required by the administration based on stagnating reading data, future meetings were not required; many teachers determined future meetings were not needed, though for many the help was warranted. Advice from Mangin would have been helpful in this situation, had I known about it. Mangin (2005) noted, "…ironically, the teacher leader's reluctance to cast herself as an expert can undermine others' perceptions of her ability to serve as a resource. If

teachers view the teacher leader as lacking expert knowledge, there is little incentive to seek the teacher leader's advice or guidance" (p. 470). At that time, I would never have cast myself as an expert; I assumed the teachers must be basing their lack of interest on my current teaching and classroom management. How different things might have been had I known my reluctance to exert my expertise might have been a more likely reason for their disinterest. In the moment, however, when looking at my calendar, devoid of ongoing meetings, I questioned my credibility as an academic coach.

The monthly HTL meeting did not help me with the lack of faith in my own abilities. I had begun looking over the topic of the next meeting and bringing the packet of training materials from my academic coaching days in anticipation of them being the same. I was never wrong; the packets were always the same. Fewer HTLs came to each meeting and the presenters always reiterated they were mandatory, preaching to the choir of HTLs who were consistent in showing up. I began to do other things during the meetings, even stepping out for frequent cups of coffee from the café, knowing I would not be challenged on it. We were rarely given time to speak with one another; when we were, the topic was always fixed, and the time limit was short. The meeting ended with a race to the car, as there was a need to navigate traffic, eat lunch, and do my best to be on-time for my first class.

I spent the HTL periods of each of my days in the beginning of February looking for new appointments. As I had feared, the lack of follow-up appointments had led to open spaces on my calendar. I worked to fill the time as best I could, but often I sat at my teachers' planning area desk and graded my own papers or planned my own classes. I overheard one teacher remark to another as they left the room during their planning time, "Why does she get extra planning time? It's not fair." I could not disagree with them, but not for the same reasons. I resented the time

away from academic coaching. Each day I considered, “What would I be doing now if I were a fully-released academic coach?” Invariably, I would imagine being in a classroom observing, or having an academic coaching conversation with a mentee, or meeting with a team of other coaches to improve our practice. I missed the pace of my previous role; I had a weekly calendar filled with appointments and a schedule which took me from one of my schools to another—sometimes with two schools in a day. Now I shuffled from my planning area desk to a classroom, then from the classroom home, and then back again.

In mid-February, the void of meetings during my HTL time turned into an opportunity for the administration and the testing coordinator. I was assigned to proctor the sophomore computer-based progress monitoring assessment each morning for a week, followed by two days of conducting “Writing for Success” seminars created by the writing coach for the sophomore students. Then, starting on the second day of March, I began a string of days proctoring the FSA (Florida Standards Assessment); first, with junior and senior students who needed to retake the test to pass it for their graduation requirement, and then for sophomores who took it for their first time as a graduation requirement and then for freshmen who were taking it for practice. There were only four (4) days in March in which I conducted meetings as an academic coach; the remainder of the time was taken in proctoring.

The situation did not improve in April, but instead grew more dire. I did not have any academic coaching meetings during the entire month, with my HTL time instead dominated by proctoring the reading FSA, the math FSA, the US History end-of-course (EOC) exam, and the Geometry EOC. There were a couple of days I was not scheduled to proctor, but I was then scheduled to cover a class for a teacher who was out sick (Thursday 4/7) and bring my data for a data chat with my district assigned academic coach (Thursday 4/13). The late nights continued

during this time as well, as there were meetings after school hours and the final conference night of the school year on 4/20. I was so stretched thin and exhausted, I called in sick on the 27th to grade papers and avoid the inevitable proctoring assignment.

*Table 1: April 2017 Calendar*

| **April 2017** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4<br>FSA Proctor pds.1-4 rm. 222<br>Faculty mtg. 3:05 | 5<br>FSA Proctor pds.1-4 rm. 222 | 6<br>FSA Proctor pds.1-4 rm. 222 | 7<br>Cover a class pd. 1-2 | 8<br>FSA Proctor pds.1-4 rm. 222 |
| 10<br>FSA Proctor pds. 1-4 rm. 22<br><br>Academic Coach meeting 1:15 | 11<br>FSA Proctor pds. 1-4 rm. 222 | 12<br>FSA Proctor pds. 1-4 rm 222 | 13<br>Data chat pd. 1 (bring data from progress monitor) | 14<br>No school |
| 17<br>Instructional Leadership Team meeting<br>2:15 | 18<br>Proctor Reading FSA pds.1-4 success center | 19<br>Proctor Reading FSA pds.1-4 Success center<br><br>PLC meeting 3:15 | 20<br>Proctor US History EOC pds. 1-4 rm 222<br><br>Conference Night 5-8 | 21<br>Proctor Reading FSA pds. 1-4 Success center |
| 24<br>Proctor meeting at lunch<br><br>Instructional Leadership Core Meeting 2:15 | 25<br>Proctor Geometry EOC pds. 1-4 Success center | 26<br>Proctor Geometry EOC pds. 1-4 Success center Make-up conferences 3:15 | 27<br>Took day off to grade papers (and avoid proctoring) | 28<br>Proctor Reading FSA pds. 1-4 Success center |

*Note*: color-coding omitted for publishing

The only time I felt remotely like an HTL, rather than just a classroom teacher, was when I attended the school-based academic coaching meetings. Even then, to the frustration of all involved, I had little to contribute based on my experiences from the month other than the progress of testing. It was as if the part of my job I loved and in which I felt the most successful prior to coming to this school, the academic coaching and mentoring part, had been taken away completely and replaced by proctoring and teaching. I had elected to be an HTL because it promised the opportunity to continue the academic coaching I loved; I felt as if I had been lied to

about the position. Had I understood or been able to anticipate my academic coaching time being negated in favor of proctoring exams, I would not have agreed to taking the position.

*May 5, 2017*

> *Stepping away from Ms. O.'s room, I'm riding a wave of exhilaration. I had entered the room 50 minutes beforehand feeling battered and battle-worn. My classes, mostly freshmen with one sophomore group, had been difficult as of late; the end of the term was coming up and the inertia of the term was now giving way to the panic induced by the realization that time was running out. Students begged to turn in work they did not do earlier in the term, scrambling to put anything on the paper that might get them the extra points they needed not to fail—a scramble that often-included cheating, for which I needed to be extra vigilant. It was all so exhausting. But now, exiting Ms. O.'s room, my tiredness and frustration has been replaced by a sense of euphoria; during our 50-minute session, Ms. O. had learned a new way of assessing her students and had found that her students needed more specific directions to complete the task based on the standards. For her own part, Ms. O. was grateful, happy that the 50 minutes had been productive, reporting that she had a better handle on the reasons for grading and how she could assess the standards going forward. For my part, I had what I coveted most—a follow-up appointment. My spirit renewed, I moved toward my classroom in anticipation of the bell sounding for my first classroom teaching assignment of the day. It crossed my mind as I entered my classroom door; This was going to be a great day.*

Unfortunately, my proctoring and class coverage schedule did not ease in May, and I was forced to cancel my follow-up appointment with Ms. O. There would be no other academic coaching sessions scheduled or conducted during this month. The elation I had experienced from my one chance to do some academic coaching was short-lived and not enough to improve my feelings about the HTL position. The year ended in a flurry of proctoring make-up exams, covering classes for those who called out sick without a substitute teacher, meetings, graduation events, and final exams.

At our final HTL meeting of the school year, we were asked to gather at 5:00 P.M. to wrap-up the current year, introduce some new HTLs who had recently been hired for next school year, and preview the next school year for the program. The room was sparsely populated, as

many chose not to attend. We were told there had been many who expressed disillusionment over the monthly meetings and their content, and changes would be made. However, instead of fixing the issues to make the meetings more helpful and supportive, the monthly meetings would be cancelled altogether in the upcoming year. Any chance we might have had to meet as HTLs and discuss ways to improve the program were eliminated with the decision. Individual principals would retain the final say over the duties of their HTLs, and the program would continue past the next year at the pleasure of the principals.

*May 12, 2017*

> *Spring evaluation meetings are an opportunity to reflect on the year's performance, determine what went well and what should be improved. I was looking forward to this meeting, as I wanted to express my dismay at the amount of time taken from the academic coaching portion of my role in favor of proctoring exams. I brought my calendar to demonstrate the number of days I was unable to do my job. I spoke of the appointments I had needed to cancel, and the string of days of proctoring on which I could not have made an academic coaching appointment even had one been requested. Mr. E. listened attentively and indicated his intention to better use my time the next school year; however, I had provided a great service by proctoring students, and I was—in his view—where I was needed at the time. I was given high marks for my work during the year. My fifteen minutes of evaluation time was over, and I am now back at my desk preparing for the next class. I had expected him to mirror my frustration; I hoped for promises of mandated training and academic coaching initiatives; I needed validation of my work as an academic coach and a confirmation of the value academic coaching could bring to our school. None of these occurred. Needless to say, I am very disappointed. I'm not sure I should do this next year.*

## Reflections at the End of the Hybrid Teacher Leader Program

The Hybrid Teacher Leader program did not end officially—in fact, there are still a few positions at various schools in the district. What happened instead is a cessation of funding for the program, which led many principals to eliminate the position from their rosters rather than funding it with their own school-based funding. In March of 2018, my principal told me of his intentions to eliminate the Hybrid Teacher Leader program at our

school. I was welcome to remain as a full-time teacher if I elected to do so. I was also welcomed to apply for district-level or school-level academic coaching positions (reading coach, writing coach, etc.) at other schools, with a glowing recommendation.

By this time, I was beyond frustrated with the Hybrid Teacher Leadership position and was happy to see it end. I had internally framed my intentions before attending the meeting at which he announced this decision; I would be applying for district-level positions to provide academic coaching full-time, rather than splitting the time with classroom teaching responsibilities. I had come to the decision during the second school year as an HTL which very nearly mirrored the first: too much proctoring, not enough academic coaching, endless meetings, and piles of grading from my too often unsuccessful classes. I no longer wanted the principal of the school to determine my time; the principals made their decisions on short-term needs like classroom coverage and proctoring, often neglecting the long-term benefits of academic coaching time. As a district-level academic coach, my time would be protected to work with the schools and the teachers most in need.

Unfortunately, most principals made the same decision about their Hybrid Teacher Leaders. As a result, many HTLs were looking for district-level positions as well. Though I was considered for three positions, I was not selected for any. I would return to my school as a full-time English teacher. It is the position I continue to hold to this day.

Teaching did not get easier once I started to teach full-time, but the classes I was asked to teach varied. I was offered more honors classes, started teaching Pre-AP level classes, and even had a couple of courses of Dual Enrollment in a program in conjunction with the local community college.

I missed academic coaching and applied for district-level positions each summer in the hopes of returning to that which I loved. Always runner-up, I have not earned my way to one of these few coveted positions. Occasionally, a teacher from those first couple of years will ask me a question or see if I can come and observe their classes and give them some advice. As often as possible I agree to do so, not only to help but to feel at home again in the work I feel I was made to do. Those times are few now, as the school has a high turnover rate for teachers and there are dwindling numbers who ever knew me as an HTL. I am now among the ranks of veteran teachers; those who know so much and could help so many, but who spend their days teaching classes of young people behind a closed classroom door.

## Findings

As I begin my analysis, I am attempting to reflect on the events and emotions of my work as an HTL in a high school to determine in what ways I might discover more about myself as a classroom teacher, a teacher leader, and a Hybrid Teacher Leader. Only then can I learn lessons which might help me with HTL roles in which I might engage in the future, as well as help others who elect to enact an HTL role—or their administrators.

Even without applying a lens to my story, it is clear from reading my autoethnography I was quite isolated in my position. Indeed, the isolation led—in part—to autoethnography as my choice of methodology. Some of the isolation was due to proximity; I had one other Hybrid Teacher Leader on my campus, though she and I made only sporadic contact through the school year. I was able to find just three lunchtime meetings scheduled with her during the first year, and one was cancelled due to a scheduling conflict. Our experiences were quite different, however, as she was not called upon to proctor exams during her afternoon HTL periods. In that

way, her time was more often protected from proctoring duty, which may have made her more available for academic coaching sessions. I do not have direct knowledge of her scheduling, so I cannot be certain she used this protected time to garner additional academic coaching experiences.

Another source of my isolation had to do with the structure of the once monthly HTL training sessions. Though I was being encouraged by those in my inner circle (friends, fellow teachers, my department head, my committee) to gather intel during those meetings, I struggled to do so effectively. Our meetings were hyper-structured, with every minute accounted for on the itinerary. The training was of the worst possible kind, a sit-and-get form of training allowing for little—if any—interpersonal discussion. Our schedule led to difficulties as well. While some of us arrived early to the meeting site, others arrived just as the training was about to begin (and a number slipping in late, possibly due to the morning rush-hour traffic on the main arteries of the city by which most of us travelled). We would have approximately three hours of training, followed by travel back to our worksites (my travel period was my lunch period, so I often consumed food during my drive back to the campus). As such, I may have desired to speak with others after the session ended, but the responsibility of being on-time for my teaching assignment was ever-present. Some might question our lack of communication through email, texts, or even social media. Unlike the fully-released academic coach cadre, whose secretary published a list of phone numbers to communicate with others in the cadre, the HTL cadre published no such list. Though I had a couple of friends on the HTL cadre initially, their meeting time was in the afternoon, and they did not stay long with the cadre. The lack of a cadre list also made it difficult to know the names of the other HTLs and know at which schools they taught; our email system was based on names and site locations, neither of which were made available to us. I cannot

speak for others, but I did not participate in social media. I came from a time in the district when teachers were advised not to participate in social media due to ethics standards. One poorly worded post, or one picture, could end a career based on the standards teachers must uphold in the community. In short, my communication with other HTLs was brief and not helpful to me in understanding if others had similar experiences as mine.

I also experienced isolation due to the role itself. As I indicated, the role of Hybrid Teacher Leader was new to the district. Back when I started as a fully-released academic coach, the program had been in effect for three years. As such, I had role models to ask when I needed help, and I was even assigned a buddy who was in her third year as a coach to help guide me and be my first point of contact when I had a concern or question. In the beginning of my fully-released academic coaching position, our meetings were weekly; as the years went on, meetings were monthly. However, I was also part of a learning community. Once monthly, we would travel to a school site and participate in teambuilding, training, and group activities to apply our new learning. Help was always just a phone call, text, or email away; I was part of a cadre of coaches and isolation was never part of my experience. My last meeting with my learning community was accompanied by tears and going away gifts we created during the session (the gift is in the room with me as I write); it was as if we were members of a family about to be torn apart by distance. When I began as a Hybrid Teacher Leader, however, that sense of community ended. We were expected to make our community with our staff at our schools. I did have the support of a site-based Professional Learning Community (PLC) to discuss teaching curriculum and data, though none of the others in my PLC shared my role (they all taught full-time). I also attended a monthly academic coaching meeting at which the school administration set the agenda and shared their goals for the month based on the most recent reading, writing, math, history, and

science data, however none of the academic coaches shared my role either (they were fully released from classroom teaching). One of Munroe's (2014) case study participants shared a similar sentiment in her position, "She explained that there was no one else she could really talk to about her experience. Neither her former colleagues who were still in teacher leadership roles outside the school, nor her former teacher colleagues, had undergone the career transition she was living through" (p. 17). My only true source of community—one where the participants shared my role—was the monthly HTL meeting, the structure of which left me with little actual support or community. My story may have been different had the community element been present; there is no way to be certain.

Though I was, at the time, only one of two Hybrid Teacher Leaders at my school, there have been others since I returned full-time to the classroom. They did not have the same title I had, but their role was similar as it was a hybrid of an academic coach and a classroom teacher. I was able to discuss with them their experiences; I was able to be the community member for them that I did not have when I was in the HTL role. Their hybrid roles were challenging nonetheless, and now only one of the individuals with whom I spoke is still a Hybrid Teacher Leader; the others have elected to return to the classroom full-time or have left the district altogether.

The isolation has led me to share my story in this autoethnography. I cannot believe I am the only one to have experienced difficulty with the Hybrid Teacher Leader role, but my story is compelling and worth examination, nonetheless. The data have allowed me to access the feelings I experienced during that time—experiences and feelings which may prove helpful to others though they may not have lived through those same exact circumstances. These feelings have led me to a more detailed story and a better foundation for my inquiry.

While isolation is a theme which presented itself with relative ease, other themes have come to light only after examination through the lenses I have chosen for this analysis. Those examinations are explained in the remainder of this chapter.

In chapter three of this document, I shared the theories which undergird this inquiry. When I first read Owens (2004) Role Theory, I was taken by the ways in which the four portions of a role—*role description, role prescription, role expectation, and role perception*—could either mesh together to create a situation in which success was possible, or conflict in many ways to create a situation in which failure is more likely. Could Role Theory help to assess whether the role of a Hybrid Teacher Leader, as it was written, enacted, or perceived, might have been a source of conflict leading to my failure in the role?

Later, in a discussion with my major professor, my questions led us to discuss a theory we were using for our inquiry into novice teachers' enactment of their teaching roles called Cultural Identities in Figured Worlds (Holland et al., 1998). Holland et al.'s work defines Cultural Identities in Figured Worlds to be "socially and culturally constructed realms of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (1998, p. 52) In our work, the data revealed novice teachers, who had claimed to detest teachers who marked their work for error correction rather than for actionable feedback, often made those language-error level types of corrections to others' work when called upon to give feedback (Sherry et al., 2016). Sherry et al. (2016) suggested there may be a dissonance between their enactments as a student and as a teacher, in that what they preferred as a student may run counter to that which they believe is necessary to enact what they envision a teacher needs to be in order to gain authority and/or respect; in those cases, the preferences students previously held were abandoned in favor of the

behavior aligned with what was perceived to garner the authority of a teacher. Could this same theory help me to understand my enactment of each of the roles in the Hybrid Teacher Leader position?

While in the final stages of writing my proposal, one of my committee members suggested I look into the psychological phenomenon of Imposter Syndrome. The syndrome, first coined in 1978 by Clance and Imes, suggests high-achieving individuals sense their own inability to live up to the expectations of others and therefore focus on their mistakes rather than their successes. Given my previous reviews of high-achievement in both academic coaching and teaching, the expectations for my performance were high. Additionally, Sherman (2013) suggested the syndrome can result in the kinds of performance anxiety, depression, and burnout I reported in our discussions. Could Imposter Syndrome have been a part of what I experienced?

With the lenses of these three theories, I examined my autoethnography to determine what, if any, evidence I can see for their application to my story. I do this for myself, as a catharsis and a way to move forward from this two-year failure in my career and life. I do this also for those who are considering a Hybrid Teacher Leader position. If my story can serve as a cautionary tale, those embarking on a Hybrid Teacher Leader role may learn from my experience, anticipate certain situations or emotions, and combat those which may lead to negative effects.

## Analysis of My Autoethnography: Role Theory Lens

To better understand my role as a Hybrid Teacher Leader, I need to express my understanding of the two roles of which the position was comprised. Looking at each

individually will lead me, hopefully, to better assessing any conflict between any portions of the role. If found, the contradictions may help to explain some of the events and may allow catharsis.

I came to the HTL position by way of a single role as a fully-released academic coach. I worked with teachers with six months or less of teaching experience and was able to stay with the majority of them for two years. Though my autoethnography does not cover much of the time I was in the academic coaching role, I can take from the experience of pursuing the new academic coaching position (prior to being hired as an HTL) as a basis for analysis of how I felt when I was in the role.

Reading the January 22, 2016, email, I am struck by the mood I conveyed to my friend and fellow academic coach in just those few lines. I used terms such as "*devastating*," and phrases such as "*we were all crying*," "*I've never seen her cry before*," to describe the meeting and the import of the message. Though I still had a semester of work to complete before the changes would officially occur, and it was always a possibility I would not have been a fully-released academic coach in the following year, the events of that day were shocking to me and, based on what I saw and heard, to the others who were in the room when they happened. I see it now like a death; our fully-released academic coach cadre was ended on that January day, and it just took me four months to fully come to the realization. While any death can have an impact on a person, even in situations in which the decedent was not particularly close, the death of the academic coaching cadre (as it existed) was quite crushing to me. To understand this, I need to look deeper into the reasons for becoming an academic coach and what the role meant to me. This step may help me to better understand my thoughts on the HTL position and why I perceived I was not as successful in the role as I had been as an academic coach.

## Background on My Role Beliefs: Academic Coach

When I left classroom teaching in 2012, I can say simply I was burned out and exhausted. I was contemplating a change in career, and each summer I would empty my classroom in anticipation of finding something new for the next school year. But I was always back the following August, ready to begin another term, as enthusiastic as most teachers are for the beginning of a school year. My enthusiasm would wane just a brief time later. Teachers are held to an extremely high standard by district personnel, principals, department heads, and fellow teachers. Too many late nights staying after school planning and grading. Too many early mornings arriving to do bus duty or set up the classroom. Too many responsibilities, from leading as the interim department head, to advising the school's chapter of the National Honor Society, to being a union representative, to serving on hiring committees, to teaching six class periods a day—three of which were Advanced Placement—my days were stretched quite thin.

I had applied to the fully-released academic coach cadre and the fully-released evaluator cadre in 2011 and had not been accepted to either. The following school year, the positions were posted again. The second time I applied, I spoke with a friend who was also on the hiring committee; I wanted to know if I should even apply, or if I should just take the initial refusal as the final word. She advised me to definitely apply, but to go into the interview with a clear decision about the role I wanted—not to be "wishy-washy"—and the ways in which I could help fulfill my duties in whichever role I selected. After looking over the two job descriptions, I chose the fully-released academic coaching cadre. From what I understood about the academic coaching cadre, I would have the opportunity to work with new teachers to help them build their skills and be more confident and successful teachers, and to retain them in teaching beyond three years (which had been found to be a major year of attrition for new teachers). I would have a

certain number of schools I would visit in a week, and I would have the chance to build relationships at all of them. And best yet, the position was fully-released from classroom teaching, with the occasional exception of leading demonstration classes for the mentees to see pacing, proximity control, and other classroom teaching techniques. To put it in Owen's (2004) terms, the *role prescription*—the culturally accepted norm of the role—for the position was of an individual who worked with new teachers, helped them in their early careers to become more skilled, instilled them with the confidence they needed to remain in the position, and had the chance to build relationships throughout the county.

The cadre I did not choose, the fully-released evaluators, used to say about academic coaches, "You're the nice ones. Everybody loves you." In Owen's (2004) terms, evaluators were alluding to the *role expectation* of academic coaches—the expectation that role behavior will remain consistent across members of the role—as opposed to their own. The fully-released evaluators were meant to evaluate teachers on the Danielson instructional rubric (Danielson, 2007) and give advice to teachers about improving their practice. While the *role perception* (Owens, 2004)—the perception an individual in that role expects others to hold for their performance—of a evaluator was one of being helpful and supportive to teachers who may not have the opportunity to engage in professional skill building conversations on a regular basis, the *role expectation*—the expectation that role behavior will remain consistent across members of the role—was actually the opposite. The evaluators were more often maligned by teachers for holding unrealistic expectations of performance based on student populations and school environments (as they did not serve as evaluators in their own schools), or for having idealized expectations of teaching because they were fully-released from the classroom and were not currently teaching. I believe it had more to do with the fact the evaluations performed by the

evaluators were a part of the teachers' annual evaluation, and therefore had an impact on bonuses and Pay for Performance monies. One negative observation from an evaluator could end the teachers' hopes for making the cutoff for important funds. While our *role prescriptions* (Owens, 2004) were not so different—working with new teachers for academic coaches as opposed to working with teachers in all levels of their careers for evaluators—the *role expectation* was quite different. The *role expectation* (Owens, 2004) of an evaluator was one to be feared and with whom to disagree.

Academic coaches, on the other hand, were able to retain our *role expectation* of helping because we did not evaluate our own mentees (we "swapped" schools three times a year to provide evaluations and advice) and our evaluations took into consideration the newness of the teacher and their current needs. While we did similar evaluative work, teachers overall noted the portion of the job having to do with non-evaluative assistance for new teachers to help retain their services. Even in our evaluative stance, our first charge was to be helpful and to build relationships; as such, the evaluations were rooted in specific data—quoted words from teachers and students, specific actions and times at which they happened, specific student reactions and the impact they had on learning—as compared to the Danielson rubric (2007). With data so rooted in specifics, and the use of the rubric seen weekly by the mentees, the evaluation process was more a coaching conversation which often mirrored the discussions mentees had with their full-time coach. I often had an equally good relationship with the mentees I evaluated three times a year as I did with the ones I saw each week. Though my evaluations would help to signal whether the mentee would be recommended for retention, the mentees were always aware of the support aspect of my role. Rather than the *role perception* (Owens, 2004) of fear which could be assigned to someone evaluating the teachers' performance, I found this method allowed the

mentees to strive to impress me. They often stated at the end of the evaluation reflection their desire to improve and to show me on my next visit a few months later. Coaches would often thank one another after the evaluation swap; mentees who had been resistant to making changes suggested by their academic coach were often invigorated to do so after an evaluation. It was as if the rubric had more meaning, the suggestions more weight, when they came from a second academic coach.

To this day, I have a relationship with those mentees who were first assigned to me in 2012. Seven of the twenty I served in my first year continue to be successful teachers within the school district. The following three years I was assigned to the same schools each year, keeping the relationships going after the mentoring ended for some who graduated from the program. Of the 47 mentees I served over those three years, 26 continue to be successful teachers in the district today. Occasionally, we see one another at district gatherings and greet each other as old friends. When the district replaced our email system in 2021, a few of my former mentees contacted me to report they were copying, forwarding, and saving some of the materials I had sent them and found useful in their current careers. At the start of the 2021 school year, amid the coronavirus pandemic, one of my mentees greeted me at her new school where she was promoted to assistant principal; she shared she had placed the present I had given her at the end of her program on the wall of her new office. Not all of my mentees were destined to remain teachers; one left a few months after beginning to instead pursue a music career. He continues to write me occasionally to tell me how he is doing; despite the distance of time and career, the relationship remains. The relationships were an important part of my role as an academic coach, and their lasting existence are a proof to me of the success I had in the role.

The relationships with my mentees were not the only ones I valued in the academic coaching position. As a cadre we were a close-knit team, despite working in different schools. There were protocols in place, from weekly training during the first couple of years in the cadre, to having a more experienced "buddy" on whom to call if there was an issue, to learning community meetings once a month at which we shared food, conversations, our concerns and our success. There was never a feeling of isolation in the position. My academic coaching friends were always just a phone call, text, or visit away.

In Owens (2004) terms, my *role description*—an individual's description of the actual behavior of her own performance of the role—I was successful in helping new teachers to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to become confident teachers who stayed with the job, while successfully building relationships turning a mentor-mentee relationship into a long-term friendship and holding a valuable place in the academic coaching cadre.

## Background on My Role Beliefs: Classroom Teacher

As alluded to earlier, teaching had become problematic for me during those last couple of years in the classroom (2010-2012) and I was not certain how long I could continue to perform at the pace I had set for myself. When I came into the district in 2003, I entered the classroom in mid-October. I had not been hired for the beginning of the school year because I was not yet certified in English. After the school's 20-day count—an accounting of the number of students to teachers on campus, possibly leading to hiring more teachers if the count demonstrates the need—I had my test results and I was all but certified (I received my certificate in late October). When I arrived on campus, the *role prescription* (Owens, 2004) for the position was like that of any other teaching role: plan lessons, pull together materials, provide high-quality instruction,

assess students fairly, and offer feedback to both the students and the parents. At first, I took over a class of unruly juniors who had not been adequately challenged by their interim teacher during the beginning months of the year. I had a tough time. In my *role description* (Owens, 2004), I was not performing the responsibilities well as evidenced by the students' lack of engagement and their misbehavior. My assistant principal, department head, and fellow teachers made it clear my performance was not living up to the *role perception* (Owens, 2004) for my position and were constantly giving me advice to help me improve. However, as our district was on a block schedule, I received a new batch of students in January. The situation improved immensely. I was able to set the standards for my class, and the students did not have another teacher's permissibility with which to compare me. My *role description* (Owens, 2004) improved when students were more engaged in the work, were less inclined to misbehave, and test scores indicated growth toward our class learning outcomes. Those who had been watching my performance indicated I was teaching more like the *role prescription* (Owens, 2004) they had envisioned. I made so much improvement, I was offered the opportunity to begin teaching Advanced Placement English Language and Composition the following school year. This was a huge step, helping me to feel confident in my abilities.

As time went on, however, I was tasked with doing more. In the first three years, I did not have tenure and could be non-renominated for any reason (or no reason at all). As a result, whatever they asked of me I endeavored to do well. As time went on, my observation ratings received top marks, my Advanced Placement students were performing on par with those who took the exam nationwide, and parents demonstrated their belief of my ability to perform not only to *role prescription*, but also *role expectation* (Owens, 2004). But I was miserable. I did not sleep enough, I spent long hours at work just to keep up, I often skipped lunch to grade papers.

My blood pressure was high, and weight fluctuated from my irregular meal schedule and lack of exercise. Though there were other teachers who went home shortly after the bell and did not participate in any of the extra-curricular assignments (evidence of actual *role expectation*—though I did not believe it would apply to me) in my *role perception* (Owens, 2004) I believed I needed to perform at the highest levels without fail. The resulting *role conflict* (Owens, 2004)—when *role expectations* and *role perceptions* are not aligned—left me feeling exhausted and anxious over a perceived slip I would be likely to have if I did not change something soon.

Though much of my work was behind the closed doors of my classroom, I did not feel isolated from my classroom teacher peers. We classroom teachers met monthly at Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings and shared our classroom experiences. I was a union representative, and thus met with not only my school's union members, but with members throughout the district on a monthly basis. I had the ear of my principal, who had hired me and who was invested in listening to my needs; I always felt as if she had my best interests in mind for the future of my career. Though I was stressed and had much on my plate, I never felt isolated from my peers in my department or school.

## My Previous Roles Combined: Hybrid Teacher Leader

When I took a Hybrid Teacher Leader position in 2016, I had the experience of both previous roles as my expectations for each portion of the new role in which I would be engaging. Based on the *role prescription* for a Hybrid Teacher Leader, I believed I would enact the academic coaching role in the first three periods of the day and enact the teaching role in the final three; I did not anticipate any conflicts, as I felt myself to be completely aware of the expectations.

However, my return to the classroom was complicated by the positive experience I had as a fully-released academic coach. As Steinbacher-Reed and Powers (2011) notes, a teacher's return to teaching based on budget cuts can be difficult for teachers who did not envision the return. My return to the classroom (by way of the HTL role) was not one I had envisioned. I applied for the continuation of the academic coaching program, fought for an interview for the position, was placed into the pool for the position (which, in effect, is being hired for the role), only to be told there were not enough positions funded for me to have a position in the role. The HTL position was a second choice, though I perceived it to be a positive solution because the *role prescription* (Owens, 2004) indicated academic coaching for half of the school day. However, a return to teaching high school classes was a negative experience for me, based on my feelings as a teacher at the end of my time in that role in 2012. Munroe (2014) compared the process of returning to a position perceived to be a backwards step to "sliding down a snake" (p. 2) rather than the perceived positive of "climbing the ladder" (p. 2); I had climbed the ladder in 2012 to leave the classroom, have greater responsibility, and slid down the snake to return to classroom teaching. My anxiety about the return to the classroom is clear. I described myself as being "*rusty*," "*not knowing the curriculum*," and anticipating "*the huge effort*" it would take to do both academic coaching and teaching. I was also "*wistfully thinking about how much better my upcoming year would have been had I been selected as an academic coach*," indicating a lack of investment in the HTL role—the teacher part in particular (as it was—I perceived—the major change between the two positions).

In her 2013 study, Munroe identified six tensions related to the return of a teacher leader to full-time classroom teacher responsibilities: "role definition, acknowledgement and recognition, little time for leadership, brief professional conversations, self-imposed

expectations, and loneliness in her unique position" (pp. 95-99). Although I did not know of Munroe's study at the time, I would not have anticipated experiencing those same tensions based on the *role prescription* for the Hybrid Teacher Leader position. The tensions "acknowledgement and recognition," "time for leadership," and "brief professional conversations" (Munroe, 2013, pp. 95-99) should all have been avoided with the academic coaching portion of my role. For three periods each day, my *role prescription* (Owens, 2004) set aside "time for leadership" and encouraged "professional conversations" (Munroe, 2013, pp. 95-99). Though I may not initially have the "acknowledgement and recognition" (Munroe, 2013, pp. 95-99) from my principal and my fellow classroom teachers because I was new to both the campus and the staff, I had similarly been new to the campus and the staff in my previous academic coaching position and had become a valuable member of each of the campuses (as evidenced by being requested for three years in a row at the schools where I academically coached and by the excitement of the principal at one of my schools at the idea of having me continue in my role at her school). I also did not anticipate "loneliness in [my] unique position" (Munroe, 2013, p. 99), because I was joining a cadre of HTLs, and I would have another HTL at my school—the latter of which I did not have in my experience in the academic coaching cadre. In addition, I assumed I would have a department of English teachers on which I could rely, as well as the previous supportive relationship I had with my department head.

However, though the *role prescription* (Owens, 2004) indicated three full periods a day of academic coaching, the reality of the role was quite different. Though I did have coaching time on some of the days, I was often tasked with other activities—such as proctoring—which provided a service to the school but did not provide the "time for leadership" and the "professional conversations" (Munroe, 2013, pp. 95-99). And although I was providing a service

to the school, there was little in the way of "acknowledgement and recognition" (Munroe, 2013, pp. 95-99) resulting from the proctoring of a student exam. Without the time to do the academic coaching which made the HTL position the preferred choice over returning to full-time classroom teaching, the role was lopsided in favor of the classroom teaching (I was rarely pulled from classroom teaching for meetings, but I was frequently pulled from academic coaching for other duties as assigned by the principal). And, as indicated at the beginning of my analysis, the isolation I felt during this time stemmed from both a perceived lack of success in my role and the ways in which the HTL cadre had been formed and maintained. For me, the missing opportunity to do the academic coaching and then not being able to express those concerns with individuals who would understand brought about the tensions as described by Munroe (2013).

I must hesitate to label the difficulty as *role conflict* by Owens' (2004) definition. According to Owens, *role conflict* occurs when *role expectations* and *role perceptions* are not aligned (2004). While at first it may seem as if the *role expectation* (Owens, 2004) was not being met, as I was consistently pulled for proctoring and other non-academic coaching activities, the *role prescription* (Owens, 2004) had always allowed for that kind of substitution by the administration; I was told as much in the July training with the refrain *"Ask your principal. your principal makes the decisions*." In terms of *role perception* (Owens, 2004), I anticipated much more frustration from the principal and staff about my lack of academic coaching than actually occurred. Although there were grumbles from other teachers when I did not have an appointment and chose to spend the time on my own classroom planning, those times were few. The majority of the time, my colleagues were relieved when I was assigned to proctor duty, since they were not the ones assigned to it instead. No, the conflict seems to have been between my understanding of the *role prescription* (Owens, 2004) of an HTL, and what my *role description*

would be (given what had actually transpired)—which does not meet Owens (2004) definition of a *role conflict*.

Munroe (2013) built her work from the framework of Role Theory and took it a step further to explain the tensions displayed by teachers returning from academic coaching to a full-time teaching position. As discussed earlier, I had not anticipated the tensions she outlined for those returning to full-time teaching, but I did end up experiencing some of those tensions because I had so little time for the academic coaching portion of my role. For me, one of the most unexpected—but I believe most impactful—tensions as identified by Munroe (2013) was the tension of "self-imposed expectations" (pp. 95-99). While I have been accused in the past of being a bit of a perfectionist and an overachiever, neither of those things have had a negative impact in my life; indeed, these qualities had helped me to strive to be better at my schooling and career, allowing me to be chosen as both a fully-released academic coach and Hybrid Teacher Leader. But it would seem my fears of not wanting to call the administration for student behavioral issues stemmed from a belief of the principal's expectation of my superiority in the classroom. When I noted I had never taught Freshmen English students before, my principal did indicate I had been given the classes I had because I was an experienced teacher. With that statement, I thought he was implying the assumption of my excellence at dealing with the kinds of behavior and learning differences abundant in those classes. Such experience was not in my repertoire; my experience—even before the academic coaching position—was with primarily older students in honors and Advanced Placement students. Though there were gifted students in those classes, as well as some who were also on the autism spectrum, I found the majority only needed motivation and organizational tips to be successful. With the classes I had been assigned in 2016, I had students who had not yet been successful in reading and writing, as evidenced by

their lack of a passing English score since 5th grade. Their misbehavior was often task avoidance, though some students' behavior evolved from mere avoidance into verbal and even physical fighting. In addition, I had students like the senior I wrote about. His behavior was so difficult, and he was hurting others. It was impossible to diffuse the situation when I had a student who towered over me, outweighed me, and often intimidated me with his size and the violence he showed to other students. I felt as if I had been poorly chosen to teach the students to which I had been assigned; I felt as if I was doing them a disservice.

The conversation and ratings I received at the end of my first year in the HTL position (May 12th entry) demonstrate the standards by which I was framing my own assessment of my performance in both the academic coaching and teaching roles—my *role description* (Owens, 2004)—was self-imposed rather than the expectation. As long as I was where I was told to be during the academic coaching time, and as long as I tried my best to teach the students, I was doing well in the eyes of the administration. Learning my expectations were self-imposed helped to some degree; I could, in retrospect, give myself some credit for making it through the rough first year. However, the knowledge did not erase the expectation I had for the position itself. The *role prescription* (Owens, 2004) was supposed to be half academic coaching and half teaching. At the end of the meeting on May 12th, I ventured to question whether I should remain in the position. I knew teaching alone would not bring me the thrill I expressed after my academic coaching meeting with Ms. O. In the end, I decided to stay an additional year for the possibility my *role prescription* (Owens, 2004) would come to fruition.

**Analysis of My Autoethnography: Cultural Identities in Figured Worlds Lens**

When examining my autoethnography through the lens of Cultural Identities in Figured Worlds (Holland et al., 1998), the theme which most reveals itself is rejection. I rejected the acceptance of my role as an HTL in an effort to align myself with my previous identity as an academic coach. At the same time, I rejected the classroom teacher element of my HTL role because I did not find success with my enactment of that role.

Holland et al. (1998) defines figured worlds to be, "…a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others. Each is a simplified world populated by a set of agents…who engage in a limited range of meaningful acts or changes of state…as moved by a set of forces" (p. 52). Holland et al. (1998) goes on to state, "A figured world is formed and re-formed in relation to the everyday activities and events that ordain happenings within it" (p. 53). The concept was not new; anthropological studies by Hallowell (1955) had written of "…worlds that are culturally defined" and individuals, "understand themselves in relation to these worlds" (p. 75). Crapanzano (1990) spoke of "arrests," which are representations of self at a particular time people try to reassert, even under new conditions.

When considering my Hybrid Teacher Leader position, I at first believed it to be an equal measure of both academic coaching and classroom teaching. Three periods had been assigned to each task, with a planning period and lunch period between them to further delineate their individuality. Though there was a single job title, the mixture of the two elements did not have a clear culture of its own. This combination is subject to the same issues as discussed in Hybridity Theory. In sociological terms, these mixtures have not usually been favored. For instance, racial

mixing in terms of marriage was illegal in many of the U.S. states until the Loving vs. Virginia case in 1967; Catholics were not permitted to marry non-Catholics until 1966, and then only with the special dispensation of the Church. In both cases, the initial union was less of a concern than the offspring of that union. The offspring would be a mixture of the two, leading to issues not easily resolved in either separate culture. One of the criticisms of hybridity is the possibility of the domination of one of the parts leading to the subjugation of the other. In racial mixing, for example, children born of a Black parent and a White parent were referenced as "Mulatto;" however, they were always considered "colored"—therefore causing the offspring to be subject to the racial norms of the period. Similarly, when a child was born to a Catholic parent and a non-Catholic parent, the Church's teaching required the child to be baptized and raised Catholic. Rather than a true mixture, the product of the union is usually faced with the identification with one or the other rather than by a recognition of being celebrated as a combination of both.

It would seem my position as an HTL had been created with the intention of two separate, equal parts being combined to create a whole. However, the rigors of teaching tend to create a lopsided imbalance shift. Planning, grading, calling parents, and the actual teaching of the lessons fills more than just the class periods assigned to those tasks. When there is a vacuum, things usually rush in to fill it. The open academic coaching periods needed to be filled; if the principal did not choose to fill them with school activities, and my teacher peers were not interested in using them for their own growth as teachers, I was left to fill the time with the more dominant activity—namely the planning, grading, and calling parents.

Yet, Holland et al. (1998) offers another way to see this situation. Rather than focusing on the two separate worlds of academic coach and classroom teacher, a focus on a single figured world—one being built and rebuilt on a daily basis through experience—may have offered

another way to understand the HTL as its own being. While I had been seeing the position as a combination of my identity as a classroom teacher—with all the knowledge, strategies, actions, and reflections created from ten years of experiences as a classroom educator—plus my identity as an academic coach—with all the knowledge, strategies, actions, and reflections created from four years of experiences as an academic coach—I was missing that the Hybrid Teacher Leader identity—the newest and still developing identity in which I was still learning the cultural norms—was its own separate being. This is a departure from how I viewed the HTL role when using the Role Theory lens. When using the Role Theory lens, I saw the HTL role as nothing more than the combined effect of two well-established roles. But with the Cultural Identities lens, I am forced to consider the HTL identity as its own figured world, one at which I was a novice and still adapting to the culture. Though I may have felt as if I had a grasp on the figured world of the HTL based on my perceived familiarity with both of the individual cultures of which it consisted, the combined effect of the singular identity was still being, "formed and re-formed in relation to the everyday activities and events that ordain happenings within it" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 53). In other words, rather than the classroom teacher figured world and the academic coaching figured world coexisting but never crossing (as in Role Theory) or combining into being with an imbalance of power (as in Hybridity Theory), the HTL is a figured world all its own. I had been so focused on the parts of the role, but never perceived the HTL as a whole.

Looking back over my July 11th entry pertaining to my training for the HTL position, I can see how it allowed me to continue to embrace my academic coach identity rather than to start learning the customs and culture of my newly adopted identity, the HTL. The training materials were the same, the talking points were the same. The only time we discussed the HTL

specificities was at the end of the training, and the answer of, "*Ask your principal. your principal makes the decisions*" was not illuminating. As a group we were attempting to get "the lay of the land" with the new culture into which we were entering but finding no real guide to help us adjust.

To make matters more complicated, I was also new to the school. As most people who have taught in multiple schools know, the culture at each school is a bit different. There are different customs—i.e., at my previous teaching location I could make my own copies, but at my new school I would need to send my copies to the copy room for a student assistant to complete—different beliefs—i.e., in my previous school, homework was expected, but at my new school students were expected to finish work in class so they could have a job or take care of younger family members after school—and different norms—i.e., at my previous school, we had PLC meetings once a month, but at my new school we have them weekly. So, while my teaching identity and place in my figured world was clear at my other school, I needed to acculturate—one culture eliminating another—to my new school's culture in order to be successful in forming the teacher figured world for this school. The questions I asked—from the simple, "*Where is the paper for my bulletin board?*" to "*Where are the books from which I will teach?*"—makes it clear I knew the customs of a teacher in general—and my old school in specific—but I did not understand the customs of being a teacher at this school. I did not have long to get acquainted with those customs; pre-planning is one week, filled with training, meetings, and events all loaded with new thoughts and actions to which I would need to adapt.

To complicate the situation further, the figured world of an HTL was new to the community in which I worked. While I was attempting to grasp the customs of my new school and to apply them to teaching, those around me were attempting to categorize me as a figure in

their own worlds. As an "agent" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 52) in their world, my identity was limited to their interactions with me. This helps me to understand—as time went on—why some saw me as an academic coach—like Ms. O. with whom I had a specific coaching session—and some saw me as a teacher—like those in my department angry about the perceived additional planning time I was getting in the mornings.

When rereading my autoethnography, I am drawn to two areas in which the figured world of the HTL should have been obvious to me, but it was not. In a way, I now see them as missed opportunities to embrace the figured world and begin to assimilate into the culture.

The first was during the August 8th "data day" entry. For that day I wrote,

> *"This new position has my head reeling. When I was a teacher only, I looked at the data for my students and made plans to improve. When I was an academic coach, I looked at the data to see how I would help my mentees plan their classes for improvement—and I only needed to focus on the data that my mentee would need…But now I have to look at the data twice—looking at all of the data (because I don't know who will ask for help yet) and focusing on the big picture to help the school improve. There was never enough time during pre-planning as it is, but I have even less time now."*

Though I had only been in the position for a few days by that point, my autoethnography reveals a focus on the teaching aspect of the job—setting up the classroom, getting supplies, going to meetings—and very little on the academic coaching side of the position. The study of data is a very normal task for both halves of the Hybrid Teacher Leader; as I indicated in my writing, I had done so before as both a teacher and an academic coach. What seems unfamiliar to me is the need to examine the data based on the hybrid role; in the teacher identity, I was clear about why I was looking at the data, but in the academic coaching identity I was floundering when attempting to determine which data points to study and how to use the data to best help teachers—who had not yet asked for my help—and a school in need of support due to "*REALLY LOW*" reading and writing scores. During the session depicted above, the enormity of the position itself began to be

revealed. What I further notice, however, is my reaction to this revelation; rather than embrace the challenge and set a goal for acquiring the data when it was needed, I immediately retreated to the teaching identity with which I felt most agency at the time. This was a result of the situation in which I perceived myself to be; I was in a room full of teachers, being asked to examine the data as a teacher planning for her classes. I never mentioned my role as an HTL and "*because I don't know who will ask for help yet,"* I was able to acknowledge the confusion and then retreat. In resisting the new identity, I allowed myself to ignore a difficult but still manageable problem by thinking about the meetings I would rather have and the classroom I would rather decorate.

For some, this rejection might also call to mind Dissonance Theory, a psychological state in which an individual faced with a dissonance of attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors will make an alteration in order to relieve the perceived discomfort. For example, people who are overweight know their habits are not healthy for their bodies and may lead to a shortened life; they may strive to change their eating and exercise habits to relieve that dissonance. I have difficulty with seeing my actions as an example of dissonance theory. In the previous example, I did not reject my role as academic coach—or HTL for that matter—in that pre-planning discussion because I acknowledged discomfort and made a change to alleviate the discomfort. I retreated from the discomfort altogether. Rather than acknowledging the need to review the data now as a teacher, and then later as an academic coach when I knew with whom I was working (especially knowing new data are constantly being made available and would be an excellent starting point for any academic coaching session) I became overwhelmed and decided in that moment I was a teacher who only needed to know the data for her classes. I did not take an action to correct the dissonance; I took an action to ignore the dissonance. Dissonance Theory does not help me understand my situation or explain my actions as well as Holland et al.'s (1998) theory has.

The next opportunity to see the HTL as a single figured world came during the November 1st entry (picture day):

> *"…Why does everything need to be a battle? I hate to write referrals on students or have them taken out from the classes—that's the part that really upset me most today. I don't think I was imagining the look on the assistant principal's face as he took the student from the room. I'm supposed to be this big hotshot coach from the district, and I can't even get a student to go to get a picture taken without a fight. Ms. Y says they understand—that they don't think anything bad. I don't think she's right."*

Here, I reject my identity as an HTL altogether during a challenging classroom situation. My assumption of the assistant principal's thoughts was clearly a reflection of my own feelings of inferiority in the teaching identity (I will need to explore this more with the Imposter Syndrome lens), but what is more striking is what I placed in the assistant principal's mind. I did not imagine he was thinking I was a bad teacher—a more logical, though still inaccurate statement. I instead thought the assistant principal's look was casting aspersions on my being a "*big hotshot coach from the district*." I notice now I thought "coach" rather than HTL, or even veteran teacher. In a difficult moment, I again retreated to a more comfortable identity—an academic coach from the district would not have any special knowledge on how to deal with a student at a particular school, but a classroom teacher should by November in the school year. I clearly favored the academic coach identity—the one in which I would not have had to deal with students acting inappropriately. In the figured world of the assistant principal, however, I was—in that moment—likely just a teacher. Not a "*big hotshot coach*," not an HTL. Just a teacher who called the office and asked for the removal of a student.

The Cultural Identities and Figured Worlds lens has given me insight into an issue which has nagged at me since my first year as an HTL. When I had a successful first three periods of

the day in an academic coaching activity, I was invigorated and felt better in the teaching role later the same day. I perceive an example of this is revealed in the January 12th entry:

> *"A quick note today because I am so busy. I started with data chats for morning, then moved on to reading a portion of Romeo & Juliet with my freshmen. I think they are going to like the story; at least they liked the beginning which starts with a brawl in the marketplace. I hope they don't only like it because there was a fight! Either way, it's nice to have their attention and to feel as if we are getting something accomplished. Another busy day of data chats tomorrow morning as well—so things are good in coaching world, too. It feels good to have turned a corner with the staff! Off to grading and planning."*

Though it is January, I am still seeing the work I do as separated into different worlds—the "*teaching world*" and the "*coaching world*." What I notice now is how I interwove the two in this diary entry—coaching first, then teaching, then coaching again, finished by teaching; though I write about the tasks from two different worlds, I resist seeing them as one HTL world. If I had, I might have been able to explain why something good happening in the academic coaching portion of the identity would give me positive feelings about the teaching portion of the identity, and vice versa. If I had been able to see it as one, I might have been able to claim greater agency as an HTL—which had been lacking to that point in the narrative. I might also have been able to celebrate the assimilation of HTL culture and have more positive feelings overall about the HTL position—which had also been lacking.

This theme is further developed in the entry for May 5th:

> *"Stepping away from Ms. O.'s room, I'm riding a wave of exhilaration. I had entered the room 50 minutes beforehand feeling battered and battle-worn. My classes, mostly freshmen with one sophomore group, had been difficult as of late; the end of the term was coming up and the inertia of the term was now giving way to the panic induced by the realization that time was running out…But now, exiting Ms. O.'s room, my tiredness and frustration has been replaced by a sense of euphoria…For my part, I had what I coveted most—a follow-up appointment. My spirit renewed, I moved toward my classroom in anticipation of the bell sounding for my first classroom teaching assignment of the day. It crossed my mind as I entered my classroom door; This was going to be a great day."*

As an HTL, I should have seen an opportunity to give just-in-time training for Ms. O., influenced by my own experiences as a teacher at the same school. However, it seems as if I saw it only in the singular world of an academic coach. Though I had difficulty with my classes turning in work revealing "*cheating*" and the "*panic*" of the end of the term, I did not think about the possibility of the same being true in her classes and I was instead offering general grading advice she should have had at the beginning of the school year. I did not use my own experiences as a teacher to inform my choice of discussion topic; I gave her advice which may have been nearly useless with final exams and the summer quickly approaching. When would Ms. O. use this information beyond today? If the students had been cheating, or simply filling in the work in a hurry to complete work at the end of the term, was the conclusion of needing more *"specific directions to complete the task based on the standards"* even relevant or realistic? What impact might it have on her assessment of students going forward? Instead of using my teaching to inform my academic coaching—in other words, being an HTL—I reverted to being an academic coach only—sharing a form and a strategy from my checklist of new teacher skills and setting the follow-up appointment. My "*exhilaration*" and "*euphoria*" came from a "*follow-up appointment*" rather than for the ways in which Ms. O.—or I for that matter—could combat the issues plaguing the grading in the classroom. I can only imagine the exhilaration and euphoria I might have experienced—as well as the relationship building which might have occurred—had I used my experience of teaching to help Ms. O. with the papers she was attempting to grade, rather than to give her a strategy which was not likely to be the solution for the situation.

Holland et al. (1998) writes, "Within the constructivist emphasis on the importance of discursive positioning…there is also a counterpart open to those who, afforded positions, do not

always take them up" (p. 137). In 2016, I was afforded the position of Hybrid Teacher Leadership. My own hurt over the loss of what I considered the perfect job, coupled with the return to the high school classroom from which I had believed I had escaped four years before, and my perception of the inferiority of the proctoring activity gave me the impetus to resist the HTL identity altogether. By refusing to find the joy in the HTL role and overemphasizing the positives of the few academic coaching opportunities in which I engaged, I lived in separate academic coaching and classroom teaching worlds of my own creation where the tasks of classroom teaching and proctoring were seen as an annoyance to be tolerated to get to the next academic coaching opportunity. Of course, I knew nothing of this at the time. Holland et al. (1998) explains, "The development of social position into a positional identity—into dispositions to voice opinions or to silence oneself, to enter into activities or to refrain and self-censor, depending on the social situation—comes over the long term, in the course of social interaction" (pp. 137-138). Holland et al. (1998) also states, "The long term, however, happens through day-to-day encounters and is built, again and again, by means of artifacts, or indices of positioning, that newcomers gradually learn to identify and then possibly to identify themselves with—either positively or negatively, through either acceptance or rejection" (p. 133). Based on my narrative, it would seem over the first year of my time as an HTL—given the new environment and the new culture into which I entered—I learned what it meant to be an HTL at my school and rejected it. Instead, I chose to live in two separate and well-known worlds—the classroom teacher world and the academic coaching world—experiencing glimpses of what it would be like to be of full member of each, but never being fully at home in either.

## Analysis of my Autoethnography: Impostor Syndrome Lens

When applying the lens of Imposter Syndrome to my autoethnography, the theme most revealed is inferiority and the fear of my inferiority being discovered by my administration, my teacher colleagues, my fellow HTLs, the parents, and my students.

I must admit, when a member of my committee suggested I investigate Imposter Syndrome, I initially consented—mostly to move the proposal process forward. In one regard, I understood the suggestion; I am a high-achieving individual, and I did have a hyper-focus on mistakes rather than on success (Clance & Imes, 1978) and as Sherman (2013) added, "performance anxiety [led] to perfectionism, burnout, and depression" (p. 57). However, the portion with which I disagreed came from Clance and Imes (1978) with their observation those who suffer from Imposter Syndrome often have a sense of inability to live up to other's expectations.

Prior to the writing of my autoethnography and my subsequent analysis of the data, I would have thought it silly to imagine I would believe of any inability to live up to the expectations of the Hybrid Teacher Leader role. I had been a successful academic coach for the four prior years; as indicated earlier in this analysis, I had worked with many new teachers and helped them to find their way in teaching. My glowing reviews combined with the new teachers' long-term success, as well as both their retention by their schools and their decision to stay in this challenging career, were—I felt—a testament to my abilities in the coaching realm. In 2012, when I was hired as a fully-released academic coach, I needed to demonstrate classroom teaching skills—comprised of both observation ratings and student test scores—which put me in the "highly effective" range of the rating scale (highly effective is the top rating). So, my

classroom teaching skills, honed over ten years in the district as a classroom teacher, were not something I would have thought to be in doubt.

Yet, as I analyze my autoethnography, one thing becomes abundantly clear to me: I felt inferior in my teaching skills. As I read and analyze, phrases pop out at me:

> *"I felt as if I had as many questions as a new person, and I did not always love the answers."*
>
> *"I have a really good idea of what to do with freshmen…But sophomores not so much."*
>
> *"It had been a difficult class: had I a dollar for every curse word my students produced that period, I would be well on my way to a healthy retirement fund. Two young men nearly fought. I could not isolate a single moment of true learning. The class period—and my instruction—had been a failure."*
>
> *"…the students are going crazy, and I am just so unhappy. One of my students cursed at me and flipped a desk…"*
>
> *"I had found teaching my students to be very difficult."*
>
> *"At the end of the first semester, the averages for each of my three classes were a dismal 66.4%, 60%, and 62%."*
>
> *"I was an academic coach in need of an academic coach."*

Taking all of these into account separately, it would seem I was not able to implement the skills and knowledge I had previously honed in this new teaching environment. Taken as a whole, however, they demonstrate a teacher who is struggling in her role and out of her depth. While I would have previously thought myself fully prepared to engage in teaching high school students, evidence was strongly suggesting otherwise.

In the portion of my autoethnography where I detail how I came to be in my previous academic coaching position, I conveyed the experience of being burned out and exhausted in my teaching career. I had been looking for an alternative and found the academic coaching

position—with its status as fully-released from classroom teaching—to be a refreshing change which reinvigorated my career and allowed me to remain in the district. I knew how to teach high school English and teach well; I just did not want to do so anymore. Instead, I used my experience to pass along valuable strategies and skills to my mentees. I would have happily continued in that task indefinitely; four years of work had not exhausted my desire to continue to be an academic coach. When I was not given the opportunity to continue doing so, I took the position which would afford me the chance to continue academic coaching in some capacity. Teaching was an afterthought—and one I did not take the time to fully anticipate. I did not choose the school for the classes I would teach; likewise, the school did not choose me for my teaching ability.

It should not be too much of a surprise—though it was then—when I did not perform well. I had not taught students in a school with 90% free and reduced lunch status, where 85% of the students did not share my ethnicity. I had not previously taught students who were high school age and at a first-grade reading level. I had a challenging time asserting myself, and students chose to ignore me when I did. They were very uncooperative; I was unable to engage them in learning. There were frequent outbursts of misbehavior including cursing and fighting. I was nervous about what the administration would say about my ability to manage my students; I see this now as the hyper-sensitivity to negative events as part of Imposter Syndrome. I did not pay equal attention to the good I was doing in the classroom; my ratings in the first year indicate I was doing good things and the students were learning, but I documented few of those successful details in my journal.

I had been afraid to call administrators to my room, even when there was a major incident requiring students' removal from the classroom. The theme of nervousness in Imposter

Syndrome relates to the possibility of being uncovered as a fraud (Clance & Imes, 1978), and is well-documented in Imposter Syndrome literature (Coryell et al., 2013; Mirra & Wescott, 2018; Overall, 1997). While other teachers routinely called for students to be removed from class when warranted, I hesitated. This exacerbated the problem, as students perceived I was soft on discipline and unwilling to follow through with the accepted procedure. They did not know, nor did my administrative staff, of my previous school's belief that students want to be removed from class so they will not have to do the hard work of learning—so their "punishment" was to keep them in the room and teach them despite their initial behavior. When the students saw they would not be removed, they ended the behavior because it was not successful. In this new teaching situation, the students would act out hoping to be removed; I would keep them in the room. However, this led to escalated measures by the students to be removed; they knew fighting would be an automatic way to be removed, so fights became frequent. While I was hoping to escape the detection of my administration for the management of my classes, the students found a way to make it impossible to hide. I see now how this can be Imposter Syndrome; I assumed one day everyone would know how poor of a teacher I was, but I would attempt to avoid it at all costs.

My students' grades were another matter. With all of the chaos in the classroom, learning was sporadic. Students who did their work and wanted to succeed did; those who did not work to succeed did not. My grades came to the attention of the administration. Despite my horror over the rate of failure in my classes, the passing class averages (a 60% is a D, which is considered passing) were successful for those students. Anything less than a "B" had always been treated like a failure in my household; I had followed the same thinking in my teaching as well. I felt like a failure, even if the administration seemed satisfied.

As I reread the September 15th journal entry, I can see the effect the poor behavior in the class is having on my confidence and mood. I write, "*Holding back a sigh, I manage to murmur, 'Have a great day,' in a lackluster tone."* I appear to be going through the motions of teaching at this point—which is only one month into the school year. As I continue, however, I do not seem to call into question my teaching ability, but rather, how others will perceive my teaching ability and the subsequent effect those perceptions may have on my ability to academically coach teachers. I write,

> *"A little voice from way down deep whispered, "Your classes are the reason you don't have coaching appointments. They know you cannot control your kids. They know your students are not successful. Why would they want advice from you?"*

I can see now how I jumped to conclusions about the effect my teaching would have on my academic coaching. But rather than confronting it, reaching out for help, and making the changes necessary to fix the issues—or finding a way to overcome my emotions about the issues if I was unable to alter them—I hid my feelings. Or rather, I did not have a perceived outlet for them. The September 16th entry demonstrates my desire to speak with others and to share my concerns, but the meeting of HTLs was not designed in a way for us to speak freely or at length. I came away from the meeting questioning, *"How am I ever going to find out if others feel the same way I do?"* I never did find out. I held those feelings to myself until November 1st when I cried in Ms. Y.'s office. Even then, I did not experience relief. I expressed my fears, and she was dismissive of them. I came away feeling no better, and possibly worse because I did not have any other outlet at the time to discuss my concerns.

Haney et al. (2015), indicates Imposter Syndrome's effect is a decrease in confidence and an inability to perform to the highest potential. By recognizing and addressing the issue, those who are experiencing Imposter Syndrome may have the ability to reshape thinking and begin to

thrive. Only now am I considering the effect Imposter Syndrome may have had on my confidence and success in the Hybrid Teacher Leader role. Had those around me noticed my mood, visited my classes, or offered support, the outcome might have been different. Had the HTL meetings been set up to anticipate the feelings which could arise from the transition to a new school, a new role, and a new way of thinking about myself as a professional, the outcome might have been different. But then, it would have been incumbent on me to take advantage of those opportunities when offered; I would like to think I would have.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## Introduction

As John Dewey is so famously quoted, "We do not learn from experience…we learn from reflecting on experience." (1933, p. 118) I am taking this journey of autoethnography to reflect on my experience and discover more about myself as a teacher, a teacher leader, and a Hybrid Teacher Leader; to give credit where it is due, to find the mistakes I made, to reconcile the ways in which some of the failures might not have been fully my responsibility, and to possibly help others as they choose to embark on one of these types of roles (or manage someone who will). These are my authentic experiences; no one—even another Hybrid Teacher Leader working during that time—could expect to have an equal experience. Yet there is much to be learned from this experience, especially if I am to continue in a profession of academic coaching, because it is so often hybridized with classroom teaching. I need to be able to take responsibility for my failures, while being aware of programmatic pitfalls which may have been inherent to the position. I will know better what to look for in my next Hybrid Teacher Leader position and can use this to resist making the same mistakes again.

At the beginning of this journey, I had questions to shape my inquiry.

- As I reflect on the events and emotions of my work as an HTL in a high school and write my autoethnography, in what ways might I discover more about myself as a classroom teacher, a teacher leader, and a Hybrid Teacher Leader?
- How might my awareness of these discoveries assist me in my future work?
- How might my discoveries assist others in Hybrid Teacher Leader roles?

- In what ways might my discoveries inform the role expectations of those who manage Hybrid Teacher Leaders, or of the HTLs themselves?

## Discoveries About Myself as a Classroom Teacher

As I reflected on the events and emotions of my work as an HTL in a high school and wrote my autoethnography, I discovered some uncomfortable facts about myself as a classroom teacher. Although I have many strategies and skills as an educator, in my first year back in the classroom after a four-year break, I did not always use those strategies and skills to the best advantage of my own mental health or the benefit of the students. To be certain, my return to classroom teaching was complicated by my desire to remain in a fully-released academic coaching position. Munroe (2014), when writing of Fiarman's (2007) study of eight teacher leaders mandated to return to the classroom, highlights the teacher leaders' "…frustration and disappointment because they were unable 'to put into practice the expanded authority, expertise, and influence which they had learned and valued while working in the leadership role'" (p. 6). Although I had chosen to take on the position, it was a second choice—and really my only choice other than returning to the classroom full-time, something I did not desire to do. When I took the position, I mitigated my dislike of the teaching element by reminding myself there would only be three class periods of teaching and I would get the chance to continue academic coaching. I did not understand or comprehend the impact the teaching would have—and the lack of academic coaching opportunities would have—on my identity as an educator as well as my identity as an academic coach.

My teaching situation was further complicated by the newness of the school, the unfamiliar curriculum, the lack of materials, and the differences in student abilities from students

I had previously taught. As Grodzki (2011) found, “The more elements of change the newcomer faces, the more adjustments and sensemaking is required of the individual” (p. 22). I also need to confront my position as a white female in the school where 85% of the students did not look like me. Their acceptance of me as their teacher, as well as their willingness to offer me the respect I believed I was due, were elements I had not considered when I took the position at this school. Both the students and I struggled to understand one another; we did not share the same preferences for music or food; I came from a higher socioeconomic background than the majority of my students; both of my parents were still married to one another; I had never experienced learning differences which hindered my acquisition of knowledge. Had any of those factors have been different, we might have found common ground. But as it was, my students saw me as the “crazy old white-lady” who taught boring stuff.

That boring stuff—the curriculum—was a struggle as well. As I had not been a teacher at the school previously, and I had not taught the curriculum previously, I was enacting a teaching identity with which I was unfamiliar. Holland et al. (1998) indicates, “A figured world is formed and re-formed in relation to the everyday activities and events that ordain happenings within it.” (p. 53). As I was unfamiliar with the teaching activities which might be more successful for the students to which I had been assigned, I enacted the teaching activities with which I was familiar from my previous teaching experience—and was dismayed not only when they did not work but made the situation worse.

Lastly, I did not at the time recognize myself as a candidate for Imposter Syndrome, but some of my thoughts, feelings, and actions indicate a strong possibility of its presence in my first year back in the classroom. Haney et al. (2018) writes, “Imposter Syndrome creates feelings of self-doubt in individuals, which can result in emotional paralysis preventing them from

achieving their fullest potential" (p. 189). As I failed to take control of my classes and engage my students in learning, I doubted my abilities to ever be successful in doing so. That doubt began to extend to my ability to academically coach teachers, as I assumed they were aware of my issues in the classroom and would not agree to meet with me as a result.

## Discoveries About Myself as a Teacher Leader

As I reflected on the events and emotions of my work as an HTL in a high school and wrote my autoethnography, I also discovered some uncomfortable facts about myself as a teacher leader. Because I had never desired to leave the single teacher leader role I occupied before becoming an HTL, I had a hyper-focus on this portion of the hybrid role. I reflect on how, in nearly every entry, I was not getting a chance to work with teachers, or that I finally had a good teacher leader experience, or I was being pulled away from working with teachers to proctor an exam or I was pulled from academically coaching teachers to cover a class. I see my displeasure with the role of an HTL—thoughts of "*this is not working*"—but in reality, I was lamenting over a different assessment of my role. In the morning, I believed my role to be like the one I had previously—released from classroom teaching, not responsible for proctoring, only responsible for observing and meeting with my mentees. My principal's view of the morning portion of my role was a teacher leader when asked and a teacher helper when needed; proctoring was an extension of helping teachers teach their classes without interruption and covering classes provided a competent substitute teacher who could help teach as the regular teacher had designed the class. Our *role prescriptions* (Owens, 2004)—the culturally accepted norm of the role—were not aligned, as my final meeting with him at the end of the school year helped me to see. While I expected his *role perception* (Owens, 2004)—the perception an individual in that role expects

others to hold for their performance—to be one of disappointment over how little academic coaching I did during the year. When he instead praised my work, I felt a lack of understanding and was dejected about the outcome of the year.

I also note how many times I spoke about missing being an academic coach. The identity of an academic coach was so ingrained in my thoughts and behaviors, it seems I could only make derogatory comparisons between it and my new identity as an HTL. As Holland et al. (1998) clarifies, "…there is a counterpart open to those who, afforded positions, do not always take them up" (p. 137). Though I outwardly identified as an HTL, I do not appear to have taken up the position fully, as through thoughts and actions I continuously identified with only the academic coaching position—one which I found to be superior to the HTL position. Oddly, this goes for the teaching aspect of the role as well; in identifying outwardly as an academic coach or HTL, I could distance my position from that of a full-time classroom teacher—a position I felt to be inferior to my skills and abilities.

## Discoveries About Myself as a Hybrid Teacher Leader

As I reflected on the events and emotions of my work as an HTL in a high school and wrote my autoethnography, I also discovered some uncomfortable facts about myself as a Hybrid Teacher Leader. I see now I never accepted the role for what it was. I attempted to enact two more familiar roles, neglecting the opportunities to see where one could have enhanced the other. Thus, my title, *Torn Between Two Worlds* is appropriate; I never viewed it as a single role and, as a result, the two halves battled for supremacy until the position ended. As I reflect on Ms. O.'s coaching session, I did not ask the right questions, which led to an inappropriate strategy being shared. Strangely, I am seeing in my actions a bit of what the fully-released evaluators—so

maligned by the teachers—were accused of doing. My suggestions were devoid of the context of teaching and of the school itself. When she brought up issues of grading, I fell back on a well-remembered and comfortable academic coaching tool I could teach her to use. She was grateful, I did get a follow-up appointment, though I now suspect it was because I helped her grade some papers clogging up her desk at the end of the term. As an academic coach, I had a certain set of tools and strategies I would need to review throughout the new teacher's first year; I would elect to go over them when the situation presented itself (i.e., I would introduce the assessment tool when my new teachers had a stack of papers and no idea how to grade them or get actionable data from them). Although my notes do not reveal the instigating issues which led me to choose the assessment tool for our discussion, as I reflect, I can see my decision was not influenced by the end of the school year and the haphazard work most students were doing to turn in late work and improve their grades. It was a missed opportunity to leverage both of my roles to make me a better HTL and to better meet the needs of the teachers with whom I worked.

As I reflect on the training I received as an HTL, I do not find it to have been adequate to my transition from my previous culture and identity as an academic coach to my budding culture and identity of a Hybrid Teacher Leader. As the training was devoid of discussion relating to the interplay between the academic coaching portion of the role and the classroom teaching portion of the role, and the training materials and content were the same as I received when I was an academic coach, I was left without the activities, artifacts, and attitudes necessary to begin the transition.

When I arrived at my school, the pre-planning week supported my teacher identity; the data and meetings gave me information for use during the classroom teaching portion of my days. My attendance at those meetings and my interaction with the staff throughout those

training activities demonstrated my role as a teacher rather than as an HTL. I noted even then how similar the information and meetings were to my previous time as a classroom teacher. This did not help me in my assimilation into the identity of an HTL.

The position of Hybrid Teacher Leader was as new to the staff as it was to me. I had a 10-minute presentation for the staff—at which I was speaking about the role from a PowerPoint slide made by the HTL program managers—to reveal what was unique about my position. Holland et al. (1998) puts it succinctly: "People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are" (p. 3). I told the staff I was there to provide training and academic coaching; I told myself the same and then tried to enact it throughout the year—despite the fact it was only a portion of my responsibilities. Holland et al. (1998) states: "Persons…are caught in the tensions between past histories that have settled in them and the present discourses and images that attract them or somehow impinge upon them" (p. 4). I was caught—by training and by preference—in my past history as an academic coach and was not open to the present discourses and images of an HTL revealing themselves to me in my daily life.

My awareness of these discoveries should assist me in making decisions about where I work and in what work I will choose to engage. I reflect on the job hunt for the Hybrid Teacher Leader position and recognize it was less a hunt and more a prize which fell in my lap. I responded to a text, sent an email, and was hired the next day. I did not ask the right questions, did not do the research on the school, and did not have any idea of what the role was meant to be based on the principal's thoughts about how he would use an HTL in his school. I had spent my time consumed with the acquisition of continuing the academic coaching role; when the role was unavailable, I took the first position which promised relief from full-time classroom teaching. I

took the position for the wrong reasons—to avoid something rather than to gain something, do something, or help something—and was unhappy with what the role turned out to be. In the future, I must do my research—on the institution, the role, and the goals for my work—before accepting a new role.

When I feel uncomfortable with my role, or my assimilation into the culture of my new environment, I will remember Imposter Syndrome often reveals itself as doubt in my own abilities. In my role as an HTL, I did not speak up right away; when I did, I spoke only to one person who—unfortunately for me—did not know how to help. Keeping the lines of communication open with those who hire me will go a long way to helping me know what is of concern and what I am doing well.

Similarly, asking questions is another way to begin the dialogue. When I took the HTL position, I based my decision solely on one element of the work and did not ask many questions. Had I asked more questions, I might still have taken the position, but I would have been better informed—especially about the school, the students served by the school, and the culture I would be joining. Asking questions might also have illuminated issues of confusion between my understanding of the role and the principal's understanding of the role. What might the school year have been like if I did not fret over the amount of proctoring and the behavior of my students, because they were already part of the principal's understanding of how the role would work!

## Implications: For Hybrid Teacher Leaders

My discoveries might also assist others in Hybrid Teacher Leader roles. From others I have seen in this district, HTL roles can be very organic, such as a hybrid between department

head or team lead and classroom teacher. These are traditional roles, have a great deal of support inside and outside of the individual school in which they teach, and those who manage them may have been in a similar position themselves at one point of their career. However, other Hybrid Teacher Leader roles are often a hybrid responsibility offered to an individual to help the school deal with money shortages and staffing and to give the individual more responsibility. I have seen a school with too few assistant principals and no funding allocated to hire another, offer a teacher who is in educational leadership classes the opportunity to try out the assistant principal role during their planning and lunch periods. I have seen a school with an academic coach for reading realize they will not have the funding to keep her position fully-released from classroom teaching, offer the academic coach the opportunity to teach a half-day and coach the other half (very much like my position was). I have seen a school with an academic coach for reading who already had a dual role as the head of the reading department (and who often filled in as testing coordinator), offer to remove the position as academic coach and replace it with media center specialist (and occasionally still work as a testing coordinator).

In all of these previous situations, the school itself is the greatest benefactor. They get to keep an excellent employee—who might have chosen to go elsewhere to keep their current role if not for the offer—, deal with budget shortfalls, and have the areas on campus staffed at least part of the time. The employee needs to ask themselves some questions and decide if the HTL position is right for them. The questions might include:

- How would you currently explain your role?
- Do you like your current role? If not, what would you change about it?
- Under what conditions would you be okay with the loss or change of that role as it exists today?

- Of what roles is the hybrid comprised? Based on your experience, does this hybrid make sense?
- Is the hybrid role at your own school? If not, how familiar are you with the new environment?
- Which of the part(s) of the hybrid role will take the most time each day? Is that acceptable to you?
- How long can you reasonably expect to be in this hybrid role? Is that length of time acceptable to you, your family, and your goals?

This list of questions is not exhaustive. What is important is questioning the hybrid role and the ways in which the hybrid role works in favor of the person doing the work. Some teachers, for instance, think about what is best for the students when making decisions. Later, they find themselves miserable because they did not take their own needs into account. The school is working on its plan, with its budget, and will have to be accountable for student safety and learning. The potential HTL needs to consider herself/himself above all else. Neither of the roles will be done well if the HTL is unhappy and unable to function.

If the person has already accepted the position of an HTL, it is important to give oneself grace. Doing any one of the roles is tough; time and empathy are needed on the journey forward in this new hybrid role. Try to think of the HTL as a single role: if it does not have a title, make one. Then tell as many people as possible about the role and work to enact the role to the fullest. If there is not a system of support for the role, consider making one. Social media is a good way to reach out to others who may share the role, though normal care should be taken to vet the answers one receives on social media. There will be times of self-doubt; resist the self-doubt by reaching out and expressing the feelings. Imposter Syndrome is real, and the self-doubt can be

paralyzing, ruining opportunities for success. If something is not working, talk to those in charge. They may see the role differently and could give some advice. Indeed, they may not even perceive the conflict until the subject is broached. If the HTL role is no longer satisfying, discuss it with those in charge; share those goals and express what will be needed to accomplish them. The person in charge has shown great faith in the HTL's abilities and will want to keep that employee—in whatever role—into the future.

## Implications: For Those Who Manage Hybrid Teacher Leaders

My autoethnography informs my suggestions for those who manage HTLs. My principal—as good of a man he is—made some mistakes when hiring me for the HTL position. For example, the text from my future department head/former academic coach colleague arrived on May 11th at 5:16 P.M; I was hired on May 12th at 3:15 P.M.; school ended for the year on May 13th and my principal had the position open since April 19th. I was desperate to find a position before school ended; he was desperate to fill the position before school ended. Though he had hired my partner from the ranks of existing staff members, he received no other applications for the position before mine—and he hired me on the spot. To be fair, most of the positions I have had in the district were also offered after a simple interview, but they were positions about which I had a great deal of information and experience. I knew almost nothing about the school beyond rumor and I had little knowledge of the HTL role. In fact, the principal himself had agreed to be a part of the grant application for funding the position without knowing much about the protocols and responsibilities. Without my knowing it, he was looking to me to be the expert about my own role. Knowing this now, I make the following suggestions:

Grodzki (2011) warns, “The more elements of change the newcomer faces, the more adjustments and sensemaking is required of the individual” (p. 22). Similarly, Munroe (2014), indicates the success of an HTL role depends on “…(a) the definition of their teacher leader role and (b) their familiarity with the school to which they returned” (p. 18). Armed with this knowledge, those who manage HTLs should do their utmost to elevate and retain their existing teachers by offering them the opportunity to engage in the HTL role. The HTL will then have their existing knowledge of the culture on which to rely and may already have some allies on the staff to help them enact their new role. If hiring a candidate from the outside, be certain to determine how much the person knows about the school, if they have any friends on staff, or if their own family members attend the school. The more familiarity with the school and its students the better.

Munroe (2014) also indicated the candidate’s need to understand the HTL role. When hiring for an HTL position, explain the decision to hybridize the roles and how the hybrid role is meant to work within the existing framework of the faculty. Explain to whom the HTL will be accountable (for instance, my department head was only my superior in my classroom teacher role; my principal and assistant principals were my superiors in both of my roles; the district leadership had very little to do with my HTL role). Discuss the envisioned allocation of time to each of the roles, and the responsibilities each role entails (for instance, proctoring exams was never mentioned as part of my job description when I took the position).

Though Clance and Imes (1978) defined the term Imposter Syndrome, many others have sought to explain its effects in their fields. Though Haney et al. (2018) writes of the phenomenon in nursing, I have discovered through the analysis of my autoethnography its effects on myself as a classroom teacher as well. Knowing it can be an issue for even the most experienced of

individuals, be certain to reach out early to new HTLs. Name some specific things which are going well; inquire about any concerns the HTL may have. Brainstorm possible solutions with the HTL—if the HTL is experiencing Imposter Syndrome, they may be feeling a loss of agency. Coming to a "solution" to a problem without their input will serve to further alienate them. Work with the HTL to build a system of support and check in on that system occasionally to see if it still meets the HTL's current needs (for instance, early in my time as an HTL I needed support with teaching the students at my school; later, I needed support with academic coaching suggestions using my new classroom knowledge).

### Implications: For Professional Development of Hybrid Teacher Leaders

My autoethnography reflects no positive experiences in my professional development for the HTL role. From materials, which were little more than copies of previously used academic coaching handouts and PowerPoint slides, to the decision to limit the amount of conversation time between participants, the training did not meet the needs of those in attendance. Eventually, the training ended altogether—a sign of recognition of the ineffectiveness of the professional development program, though I am certain funding for the training may also have been a factor.

While the training of coaching conversations is admirable—and should absolutely be included in any professional development program in which the participants will be engaging in those types of conversations—the training should not stop there. Professional development should also include discussions of the tensions those returning to the classroom might experience (Munroe, 2013) and allow for periods of free discussion for participants to share their experiences and seek confirmation of their impressions and feelings with others who share their role.

Mangin (2005) notes, “ironically, the teacher leader’s reluctance to cast herself as an expert can undermine others’ perceptions of her ability to serve as a resource. If teachers view the teacher leader as lacking expert knowledge, there is little incentive to seek the teacher leader’s advice or guidance” (p. 470). When I arrived on campus, I had little knowledge of my role and what my principal hoped I would do in terms of academic coaching and classroom teaching. I then passed this lack of agency onto those who would need to seek my help in the classroom. By not being able to articulate my role, to explain the goals of the program, and to highlight my skills and abilities to the staff, it was far more difficult for the teachers to have the desire to reach out to me. Those who provide professional development to HTLs should be certain to explain this and provide the HTLs with the language to introduce themselves and their skills to their staff.

Professional development should also include an acknowledgement of the interplay between the roles to create a new culture—that of an HTL. At the heart of such discussions should be the recognition of the HTL’s unique role in the school environment and the ways in which both the school and the HTL herself will need to learn what it means to be an HTL. While it may look different for every school, the position of an HTL is one quite different from others in a school because of its duality. HTLs are not only academic coaches and not only classroom teachers; HTLs are both simultaneously and should be taught to use what is shared and learned in the enactment of each role to inform the enactment of the other. While this nuanced approach may defy the use of handouts and PowerPoint slides, activities such as the “problem-posed-problem-solved protocol” may help HTLs leverage the learned experiences of others in their role to influence choices they make with the faculty in their own schools.

To do this, however, leaders of such programs must appreciate the need for a time and place for HTLs to gather and ask those who manage HTLs to support the HTL in making those gatherings a priority. My own story evidences my lack of understanding of my own needs during that first year; epiphanies which might have influenced the ways in which I enacted my HTL role and worked with teachers only came after years of analysis and study—much too late to provide the best academic coaching for my teachers, quality teaching for my students, and proof of the program's effectiveness for my principal. I wanted to reach out, but I did not have a forum to do so; a quality professional development program would offer such a forum.

## Recommendations for Further Study

My autoethnography depicts my experience as an HTL. Throughout my time in the role, I spoke of my dismay at not being able to discuss my issues with others in the same role to see if they were experiencing the same types of complications. Later, after my role concluded and the HTL program all but dissolved districtwide, others in my orbit have taken on other HTL types of roles. With the prevalence of HTL positions in my district alone, this is an area of study worthy of additional consideration.

Though the HTL program was not successful at my school—and was not for others, as evidenced by their schools ending their program at the conclusion of the funding—some schools were able to make it work. Additional study into the ways in which their programs mitigated the tensions, provided the professional development, and offered the necessary support for their HTLs might illuminate ways other programs could do the same for their HTLs.

I have always wondered if other HTL's experiences are like my own; my positionality as a white, middle-class, cisgender female of 44 years was a factor in my school. Delamont (2012)

criticizes "…too often the ethnographer has been a straight, highly educated middle-class white or Jewish man from the USA. Work by gay and lesbian authors, by women and by non-whites has been less common" (p. 14). Further research should invite HTLs of all backgrounds to share their stories as a means to help others in the role who are feeling isolated as well as to provide additional data into the culture of HTLs at different worksites.

I wonder whether HTLs feel as if they had the full understanding of the hybrid role before taking the position; this could influence research into the hiring practices surrounding HTLs.

I wonder if HTLs think of themselves differently in their new role than they did in their previous role; this may illuminate the need for further research in the field of professional development and the ways in which training supports the acquisition and assimilation of culture.

I wonder, too, if others treat them differently now that they are in their new roles; this may illuminate the need for further research on the cultures which are the most successful at retaining HTLs.

I wonder if HTLs are satisfied with their role and wish to continue in the hybrid role; if not, which one—if any— of the roles would they choose? This might reveal a need for additional research in educational leadership, particularly in the practice of the hybridization of roles.

I wonder at the training HTLs received for the role; was it sufficient? In what ways might it have been better? Again, this may reveal additional avenues of research in professional development.

I wonder if other HTLs have a support network and if they know how to reach out if not. This research could extend to both educational leaders and to HTLs themselves.

I wonder if they have experienced Imposter Syndrome…if they know the symptoms of it…what they have done to combat it. This is an area of research valuable in educational leadership, professional development, and for the HTLs as well.

I wonder if HTLs feel heard, noticed, and respected by their administrative staff. A study of this would have implications for both administrators and HTLs themselves.

## Conclusion

Unfortunately, budgetary concerns too often dictate educational decisions in public schools. In a perfect world, there would be enough money to make hybridizing roles infrequent. In that perfect world those positions would be hybridized because they would have a positive effect on student learning and employee satisfaction. We may never live in that world.

I began this journey to better understand what happened during the first year I was in a Hybrid Teacher Leader position. As it was my last teacher leader position, I needed to understand where it went wrong so I could prevent it from happening to me—or others I advise—in the future.

I chose autoethnography because the system which governed our training did not afford me the opportunity to discuss my experiences and resolve my issues. I was fortunate to have my story, detailed in journal entries, vignettes, calendars, and email, ready to be told, analyzed, and understood.

I chose the lens of Role Theory (Owens, 2004) to discover if there was something inherent to the hybrid role itself which caused the issue. I found there to be no conflict between the roles themselves, only my understanding of the *role prescription* (Owens, 2004) for my

hybrid role and they ways it differed from that of my principal's understanding of the *role prescription*.

I chose the lens of Cultural Identities and Figured Worlds (Holland et al., 1998) to discover if there was something in the way I enacted the hybrid role. I found I never fully embraced the hybrid role, preferring to see myself as the academic coach I once was. The classroom teaching element was an unwelcome daily reminder of the identity I did not wish to embrace. The academic coaching identity was not fully realized as episodes of proctoring student exams, covering teachers' classes, trainings, and meetings took the place of the academic coaching activities I relished. When academic coaching did occur, I did not use the experiences I had gleaned from being a teacher to help inform my questions, discussions, and recommendations. By not embracing the identity of the hybrid role and forming a new figured world, I was a worse version of each of the separate roles.

I used the lens of the Imposter Syndrome (Clance & Imes, 1978; Sherman, 2013) because my story, once it was told, cried out for it. Though I was initially hesitant to admit Imposter Syndrome might even be an option, the self-doubt, paralysis of action, and depression in the account of my teaching experience were clear indicators of its presence. Imposter Syndrome does not just occur in those who believe they got lucky and entered a position for which they were not adequately prepared—I was experienced in both portions of my role. It sneaks in when the expectations of the role exceed the perceived ability to manage them. As a teacher in a new school, with new curriculum, and students with learning differences with which I did not have experience, and with backgrounds different from my own, I felt the self-doubt of Imposter Syndrome and did not have the tools, support, and training to identify it and deal with it. Those

around me were unaware of how to help me—they may even have been unaware there was something with which I needed help.

When entering the world of academia, I will again be facing a hybridized position in an environment completely new to me. Research, teaching, and service are all elements of the work I will need to balance and manage. I will need to transition from my previous roles in academia—those of student and adjunct teacher—to professor, with all of the responsibilities and honors the title entails. My discoveries from my autoethnography may make this next journey a more successful one. I will know to research the institution, to ask about the division of time, to question the types of classes I might teach, and to see where my skills and knowledge might contribute to the work in which my colleagues are engaging. I know to look out for Imposter Syndrome and to be open with those who can help me overcome it and be as successful as I have been prepared to be. Lastly, I know my assimilation to this new culture— of both the position and the place—will be a day-to-day process and not always smooth. However, relying on those who have come before me for support and friendship, I will be setting myself on the path toward success. I look forward to the journey ahead!

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