LESSONS LEARNED FROM ORAL HISTORIES

GATHERED FROM THE APRIL 2018 OKLAHOMA

TEACHER WALKOUT

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Submitted to the Faculty of the
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in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
December, 2020

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To those who have gone before and guided the way
(Drs. Young … Dr. Mackie … Dr. Zhao … Dr. Bindewald … Dr. Sanders)
I thank you

To those who supported this journey despite my absence and loved me nonetheless
(My parents … My sisters … My nieces & nephews … My friends & colleagues)
I thank you
(even my ex)

To the ones who cheered the loudest
(Mikael … Cara … Marisha … Justin … Lola … Linda … Zoë … Tim)
I thank you

To the one who gave me hope when the hopelessly hopeful felt heavy and who entertained and encouraged the messy – the erratic – the creative
(Dr. Bailey)
I thank you
(with all the sunflowers this world can hold)

To the one who just knows and who is and will always be
(Patti)
I thank you

To the teachers – the Walkout participants – the OEA staff – the Narrators – those who daily give of their time & talents
(to make the future of education better)
I thank you
(for using your loudest & your bravest teacher voice)

And finally, my boys
(Christopher & Kedryn)
I thank you & love you
(for simply being)

Know this is for you

Name: RHONDA HARLOW

Date of Degree: DECEMBER, 2020

Title of Study: LESSONS LEARNED FROM ORAL HISTORIES GATHERED FROM THE APRIL 2018 OKLAHOMA TEACHER WALKOUT

Major Field: EDUCATION

This qualitative oral study study's primary purpose is to elicit, preserve, and explore personal stories from individuals who participated in the April 2018 Oklahoma Teacher Walkout. The study also builds understanding of narrators' experiences of the events surrounding the Walkout. In addition, as supported by oral history methodology, the collection of individual stories collectively provides glimpses into the historical context and significance of the Walkout through the perspective of those who experienced it. For this study, 22 narrators participated from rural, suburban, and urban communities and school districts from across the state of Oklahoma. A semi-structured interview protocol and photo-elicitation methods were used. A variety of unique, analytical methods were used to make meaning both within and across narratives (Patton, 2015, p. 47). Inductive analysis was done through drawing and visual representations along with data displays, data poems, and found poems. Interconnected themes emerged from the accounts that centered on, first, participants' emotional experiences during the Walkout in being seen and heard, physically and symbolically, and the Walkout's amplification of teacher voice; second, the expanding sense of community narrators' experienced through participating; and third, the feelings of public affirmation, respect, and mattering (Flett, 2018) as educators. Together this study contributes to the limited scholarship on teacher activism by giving voice to those educators and stakeholders who assembled en masse on the state's Capitol for nine days in April. Their oral accounts reflect embodied components of their participation as well as fluid, shifting, conceptions of community that both reflected and were further forged through the interactions and events. It also contributes to the sparse qualitative scholarship regarding teacher walkouts historically and regionally.

Keywords: educators, Oklahoma, Oklahoma walkout, strikes, teachers, activists, oral history, teacher unions, unionism, teacher activism

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this qualitative oral history study is to elicit, preserve, and explore personal stories from people who participated in the April 2018 Oklahoma Teacher Walkout (hereafter, Walkout) to build understanding of participants' experiences of the events surrounding the Walkout. Further, as aligned with oral history methodology, the collection of individual, lived experiences surfaces glimmers of insight into the historical context and significance of the Walkout through the perspectives of those who experienced it. In addition, this study provides examples of teacher activism within a right-to-work state that represents a conservative, socio-political landscape. Through creative research approaches, this also contributes to developments in oral history methodology and analysis.

The Walkout was one of multiple mass teacher actions that occurred across the nation from 2012 to 2018. Educators and education stakeholders assembled en masse in places such as Chicago, Los Angeles, West Virginia, Kentucky, Arizona, and Oklahoma to give visible, embodied representation of teachers' and other educational stakeholders' concerns regarding public education. Educators and education stakeholders voiced these

concerns by using their bodies through protests, walkouts, and marches. This study explores key incidents and components surrounding participants' experiences in the Walkout by drawing from participants' accounts to highlight dimensions of the Walkout -- in their own words -- to demonstrate the power of oral history as a tool for preserving individual accounts of historical events. It also highlights the narratives as it cumulatively illuminates broader concerns about education occurring in the state and nation at this historical moment.

Context of the Study

There is a long history of activism on behalf of education in the United States. In addition to the many advocacy roles teachers take in their classrooms (Picower, 2012), teachers have protested a range of serious issues affecting their work, including continual funding cuts to public education that affect the quality of experiences they can provide to the nation's children, changes in pensions, inadequate salaries, market-based reforms, and a culture of teacher blame that has saturated national rhetoric.[1] Educators have protested through social media, strikes and walkouts. They have also written personal narratives. As one scholar articulated, teachers "typically don't have access to the megaphone, platform or airwaves to be heard" (Nuñez et al., 2015, p. xiii). Some have even characterized teacher attrition as a form of "silent protest" from teachers (Glazer, 2018).

The Oklahoma Walkout was part of a broader series of national protests that occurred in 2018. Some described these events as a "red-state revolt" reflecting the "discontent" among educators in "conservative states" (Blanc, 2019, p. 5; Pearce, 2018). In late February 2018, West Virginia led the wave of national action during this period

[1] Portions of this dissertation include material from one co-authored chapter one co-authored manuscript with Dr. Lucy Bailey currently under review for publication.

with a strike that resulted in promising gains that inspired teachers elsewhere in the country. In Oklahoma, the Walkout was an important effort for teachers to be heard and to make visible the needs of education. It lasted nine intense days that included mass protests at the state Oklahoma City Capitol building. Overall, the concrete gains for Oklahoma teachers may have been more psychological than legislative. As one reporter noted, "the biggest change came before the strike began, when the legislature passed a salary increase worth about $6,000 per year" (Fay, 2018). Yet, even after that legislative decision, educators made the bold choice to continue with the Walkout to fight for funding for their classrooms, staff, and for their students. For many teachers interviewed for this study, the Walkout was not about gaining more money for themselves in salary increases but rather for their students and public education. The Walkout gained national attention as well.

Statement of the Problem

In the wave of the "red state revolts" that occurred in 2018, teachers found a willingness to "embrace their defiance" and for many "this was the first time they'd made a speech at a rally, convinced coworkers to participate in political action, spoke to the press, chaired a mass meeting, or confronted a politician" (Blanc, 2019, p. 5). However, defunding of public education and deskilling of educators as professionals had been occurring for decades through various forms of legislation at the national and state level. Yet, educators seemed reluctant to collectively join in the political process in the interest of public education. Instead some educators deferred to educational lobbyists such as the Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) or other select education-based organizations to lobby on their behalf while they stayed in their classrooms and attempted to do their jobs

with less -- less funding and less legislative support. Yet, in April 2018 in Oklahoma more than 30,000 educators, educational advocates and leaders, and members of the public walked out of their schools in support of education.

Typically, educators are hesitant to regularly engage in and become involved with the legislative process or various forms of political activism. In turn, few teachers overall identify as "teacher activists" (Robert & Tyssens, 2008). Instead, teachers typically adhere to a "teacher servant" identity that focuses on the "superior interest - the interest of students" (Robert & Tyssens, 2008, p. 512). This lack of activism identity may also deter many teachers from using the word "strike" or feeling comfortable participating in strike-like activities. Research indicates that teachers avoid the use of the word "strike" due to its perceived unprofessional connotation and perception of rebelling (Levine, 1970; Robert & Tyssens, 2008). This historical reluctance speaks to the question of what triggered participants to engage in the 2018 Walkout.

Currently, there is limited scholarship on Oklahoma teacher walkouts, advocacy, and activism (for an exception, see Lynn, 2018). Blanc (2019) published a book that addresses the recent wave of education strikes, which included Oklahoma. However, there is limited scholarship on teachers' involvement in the efforts which limits understanding of *why* educators took collective action. This gap creates an absence of educator voice in scholarship which limits understanding teachers' actions when advocating for their jobs and their visions of education. There is also an absence of scholarship in relation to other educational stakeholders who act on behalf of teachers, students, and education. This gap also furthers a lack of understanding of the broader, historical significance of the Walkout situated in a right-to-work state. More scholarship

and accounts of teacher voices in educational activism are needed. They can also advance understanding of the specific geographic contours of job actions on behalf of education.

Purpose of the Study

The study's primary purpose is to gather and preserve the personal stories from participants of the April 2018 Oklahoma Teacher Walkout to build understanding of their experiences of this notable advocacy event on behalf of public education in Oklahoma. The 2018 Walkout happened to be the first substantial walkout in Oklahoma since the early 90s. The Walkout also connects to the broader historical significance of teacher activism in states typically heralded as politically conservative. In this study, narrators' reflective accounts are preserved and offer glimmers of the broader historical context of the Walkout. This study also expands the sparse qualitative work on teacher walkouts and teacher activism both historically and regionally.

Conceptual Framework

This is a constructionist study with an interpretivist theoretical perspective. I also see teachers as embodied agents capable of shaping the material conditions of their work lives and the children they serve (e.g. Freire, 1970). This study's oral histories are key vehicles for capturing voices rarely heard in public deliberations (Nuñez et al., 2015). They have emancipatory potential in highlighting teachers' voices who constantly fall to the shadows in public theorizing and participatory dialogue about the vision and orchestration of schools. As scholars have emphasized, "Teachers have been noticeably absent from the debate over the direction and the future of public education" (Nuñez et al., 2015, p. xiii). Like others (e.g. Gardner, 2003; Goodson, 1992), I see value in preserving teacher's memories as contributions to the "democratizing the production of

history" should be honored and recognized (Gardner, 2003, p. 175). Too often, politicians, state agencies, and superintendents command center stage in public dialogue, spearheading reform, and educational histories, leaving educators as a marginalized population in relation to those in administrative and legislative power.

I leaned on Crotty's (2013) research framework as I worked through the epistemology and theoretical perspective of this oral history study. I worked with the constructionism epistemology that offers the view that meaning emerges and is constructed through human interaction (Crotty, 2013, pp. 42-43). From this epistemology, I then moved to the interpretivist theoretical perspective which "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social world" (Crotty, 2013, p. 67). This pairing allowed narrators' meaning of the Walkout to be understood and interpreted through our interactions with the social world.

My approach to this study was to remain open as the study, data, and analysis unfolded. It is my understanding that the meanings (or truths) of the Walkout could not be described as either subjective or objective but, rather, is constructed into meaning by the participants and observers (Crotty, 1998, pp. 43-44). By gathering multiple narratives centered on a single event, I came to realize there would be multiple constructed meanings surrounding the Walkout. My inquiry aim was to allow an unfolding of data to emerge which would then offer a deeper understanding of the individual insights of the Walkout as situated in a specific historical moment and event for education activism. The reflective dialogue between the empathic, researcher-participant had the potential to be transformative for both participant and researcher-participant by offering voice to those who are often voiceless within their own profession. Also, as the researcher-participant, I

sought to embrace the "messy" contours as the study unfolded (Lather & Smithies, 1997) and to honor embodied "doing" of the research "with" the participants in order to come to a richer "knowing" (Ellingson, 2017; Hesse-Biber, 2014; Shilling, 2012).

Inquiry Questions

Since public education issues had recently garnered more attention within society and across the nation, especially in Oklahoma, I wanted to delve into the lived experiences of the Walkout participants and in turn, gain a deeper understanding of the following Inquiry Questions:

1. What triggered participants to join in the events of the April 2018 Oklahoma Teachers Walkout?
2. After participating in the Walkout, what do participants envision for the future for Oklahoma's education system?
3. What varied experiences did participating in the Walkout have for narrators?
4. What do participants' stories reveal about the context and significance of this teacher collective action in a right-to-work state?

Aligned with oral history, the goal of this study is to preserve participants' voices (Perks & Thomson, 2016; Sheftel & Zembrzycki, 2013). Conducting interviews of individuals who witnessed and participated in the events surrounding the Walkout creates a written record, gives voice to a typically under-represented group, teachers, within the education system, and provides glimpses, where possible, to the Walkout's historical significance (Gall et al., 1996).

Overview of Design

This oral history study, which began in May 2018, focuses on eliciting and preserving individual accounts of the Walkout. Oral history has varied purposes. One function is that it provides a vehicle to preserve accounts of phenomenon in narrators' own words. These accounts can cumulatively offer a broader portrait of historical phenomenon and events. In this case, it also provides a direct channel to centering the voices of teachers, leaders, and community members as agents of change. On a personal level, the study provides an opportunity to narrators who participated in the Walkout to process their individual experiences through reflectively recounting them to an empathetic and fellow participant. Additionally, through the unfolding of analysis, I further processed the events from the Walkout to consider common patterns in participants' accounts, during the emotional context of the COVID-19 pandemic in which Oklahoma schools moved to distance learning and communities moved into quarantine.

The unfolding of the participants' stories gives a richer understanding of the Walkout. For this study, 22 narrators (a term for those who share their oral accounts) participated from rural, suburban, and urban communities and school districts from across the state of Oklahoma, representing 6 of 77 counties. I contacted individuals in my professional and social networks to invite them to participate in interviews about their experiences. I used email, phone calls, and face-to-face invitations to do so. I gathered additional key informants through snowball sampling. As individuals were identified and interviewed, I asked them to identify another key informant who might be interested in participating in the study. My original goal was to gather representative narratives for each county of the state. However, the realities of a full-time job and participants' ability

and willingness to offer an interview during their own busy lives prevented me from obtaining that goal.

Participants

All stakeholders who participated in the Walkout and this study have served or do serve as educational agents and supporters through their parenting or civic roles, whether as teachers, administrators, Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) employees, or in other roles in the schools. Of the 22 participants, the majority are primarily white, aged 30 through 60, with the majority identifying as female (18 out of 22). A few identify as Native American. Of the narrators, the majority had children and/or grandchildren ranging in ages of three-years old to college-aged at the time of the interviews.

Methods

I used a semi-structured interview protocol and photo-elicitation methods with researcher-provided photographs during the interviews (Harper, 2002). I used photos of Walkout events from online sites and my personal archive as prompts for dialogue. Conversations began with general questions about the participants' background and memories of the Walkout followed by the introduction of the photos to prompt reactions and reflections of the event. Participants self-selected the location for their interviews which included the following places: a coffee shop, classroom, pub, Skype software, and a restaurant.

As Avener et. al. states, "I am a 'theoretical fence sitter' (as cited in Ellingson, 2017, p. 3) who engages openly in 'promiscuous analysis'" (Childers, 2014). I used varied unique analytic methods to make meaning of the narratives including drawing, visual representations and data displays, emotional analysis, data poems, time-line, and

narrators' use of pronouns, attention to sound (Gershon & Appelbaum, 2018), place-based reflections, and attention to the actual signs teachers made and used in the walkout (Slocum et al., 2018). I also brought the concepts of embodiment (Ellingson, 2017), assembly (Butler, 2015), and mattering/antimattering (Flett, 2018) to bear on analysis of inductive themes gathered across narrators' accounts. Also generative was the dialogic exchange between myself and my advisor, Dr. Bailey, to catapult and nuance understanding (see Chapter III for more detail).

Lastly, I combined narrators' words to seek some common themes across accounts in Chapter IV, Chapter V, Chapter VI, and Chapter VII. This approach provides individual accounts to be explored collectively across those common themes. Yet, I also worked to preserve longer accounts in narrators' own words as characterized of oral history as a methodology. This preservation is evidenced in Chapter VII. I, also, incorporate these longer narrator accounts throughout the document to preserve the unique characteristics of narrator speech and storytelling as Walkout participants described their experiences. Some narrations reflect the broader historical context of the Walkout. These historical glimmers can be found in Chapters II through VIII.

Positionality

As both the researcher and a participant of the Walkout, I address my positionality and own lived experience of the events with continued reflexivity as a component of the study. I present these aspects of my oral history and my reflections in Chapter VIII. My layers of positionality intersect with those of participants. I encountered some differing lived experiences surrounding the Walkout and yet, also had overlapped experiences with some narrators. Ellingson's (2017) concept of intersubjectivity "helps to illuminate the

common ground in which researchers and participants meet" and how the embodied experiences are "intermingled, reciprocal, and enmeshed... overlapping... both sameness and difference" (p. 21). From this understanding of intersubjectivity, I worked through my positional layers as connected to the participants with a clear understanding that by embracing the "doing" of embodied research, I was researching "with" the participants rather than "on" the participants, as Lather & Smithies (1997) frame their work.

Significance of the Study

This is an oral history study that adds value to exploring the historical significance of the Walkout by preserving the personal stories of its participants (Perks & Thomson, 2016; Sheftel & Zembrzycki, 2013). It contributes to limited qualitative scholarship centered on teacher walkouts that occur in conservative, right-to-work states such as Oklahoma by providing insights to the narrators' Walkout experience. In addition, this study adds to literature focused on teacher voice and activism in relation to neoliberal reform and within its regional context. Also, the study's findings benefit future research and scholarship surrounding emotional expression of teacher voice and activism, community experience through assembly, and mattering/antimattering, defined by Flett (2018) as feeling significant to others or feeling insignificant to others (p. 6). These findings connect to the teacher activism identity that is too often absent when educators discuss themselves in relation to the political process. It is worth noting available scholarship focuses on places like Chicago, Philadelphia, and other large, urban cities and therefore, does not mirror the socio-political contours of Oklahoma as a right-to-work state. The narratives reveal a need for sustained teacher activism and voice within the political process. They also affirm the need for educators to maintain or increase their

political awareness of the structural forces that impact the day-to-day events in their classrooms and the advocacy and actions that can effect changes at that level.

Summary

This interpretivist oral history study sought to gather and preserve the individual stories from participants of the Walkout with the intent of exploring participants' experiences and expanding understanding of the Walkout's historical significance. Eight more chapters follow. Within these chapters, there are longer narrative accounts woven throughout to amplify narrator's voice. Chapter II focuses on key events and forces in the socio-political climate in which the Walkout occurred. In Chapter III, I discuss the research design and details of how I conducted the study. Chapter IV, V, and VI each focus on a research finding. Chapter IV focuses on the research findings centered on the emotional and corporeal elements of participant experiences that emerged from the data and the importance of teacher voice that these themes reveal. Chapter V highlights the creation of varied forms of community and unity during the Walkout and the affirmation of community support the Walkout provided participants. It also highlights some important divisions within the unity of protest that characterized the dynamics of this Walkout. Chapter VI focuses on the findings focused on the concept of "mattering," which is a concept Flett (2018) describes in his book by the same name. Flett describes "mattering" as human beings' need to feel like they are significant, that their actions matter to others, and its connection to participants' teaching labor and interactions with and perceptions of the Oklahoma legislature and other groups associated with the Walkout.

Chapter VII gives an in-depth account of two narratives, The Boy and The Turtles, which encapsulate the three primary themes, the emotion of teacher voice, community affirmation, and the sense of mattering, as it relates to the Walkout and the education collective. This chapter also offers longer sections of narratives to foreground narrator voice. In addition, the themes provide insights into the historical events of the first walkout in Oklahoma since the early 90s. The themes reveal emotional expression of teacher voice which was a prominent factor in the narratives. In addition, there was an expanded sense of community and expressed components of mattering/antimattering. These themes respond to the Inquiry Questions focused on individual significance as well as collective insights about educational walkouts in this geographic context. This extends literature that addresses the precarity and possibilities of teacher voice and activism in light of neoliberal education reforms (Blanc, 2019; Brogan, 2014; Convertino, 2016; D'Amico Pawlewicz, forthcoming; Dyke & Muckian, 2019; Robert & Tyssens, 2008; Rodriguez, 2015; Slater, 2018; Watts, 2020; Weiner & Asselin, 2020). Chapter VIII presents my reflexivity and elements of my own oral history. I also, address my layers of positionality in relation to the study. Finally, Chapter IX closes with discussions of the findings, their implications for Oklahoma education and collective action, the broader significance in relation to education walkout scholarship, implications for research and practice, and suggested future research based on the findings.

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CHAPTER II

THE SOCIAL AND POLITCAL LANDSCAPE SURROUNDING THE OKLAHOMA APRIL 2018 TEACHER WALKOUT

"...this is our government...this is our state...this is our priority and we need to make sure that those who represent us -- not govern us -- those who represent us ... they need to understand they need to be doing what the people want." (Matt, Walkout Participant)

Introduction

Education reform is rarely in the hands of teachers. As scholars have emphasized, teachers "typically don't have access to the megaphone, platform or airwaves to be heard" (Nuñez et al., 2015, p. xiii). Yet teachers have agitated for change in a range of ways in their local contexts: through their teaching practices (Picower, 2012), through critical social movements historically (Blanc, 2019; Brickner, 2016; Brogan, 2015; Robert & Tyssens, 2008; Scribner, 2015, August), through community activism in local contexts (Montaño et al., 2002) and through protests about issues affecting education (Blanc, 2019; Goldstein, 2015; Nuñez et al., 2015; Uetricht, 2014). In fact, like Glazer (2018), some consider teachers' drastic attrition from the teaching profession a form of silent protest about the conditions of their working lives. One form

of activism has been work stoppages or labor strikes. Research notes that over 3,000 teacher strikes have occurred in the United States since the 1960s and that the majority of teacher strikes were local actions taken against school boards (Blanc, 2019; Levine, 1970; Neirynck, 1968; Scribner 2015). Historically, educators have resorted to strikes in order to improve student learning environment, improve teacher working conditions, and gain salary increases (Brogan, 2014; Levine, 1970; Neirynck, 1968; Nuñez et al., 2015). Although Blanc (2019) notes that teacher strikes in the United States declined overall during the 1980s and 1990s, Oklahoma's teachers successfully converged on the state Capitol for 4 days in 1990 to urge the governor to sign a much needed bill that would increase funding and teacher pay along with other educational changes. Teacher strikes regained national attention in 2012 when the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) led a strike that garnered strong member engagement, public support, and stakeholder participation (Brogan, 2014, p. 160).

Yet, the concept of teachers utilizing work actions is not new. Teachers and teachers' unions have engaged in work actions for nearly a century. Research shows that teacher work actions have taken several forms such as one-day walkouts, marches at the state's Capitol, en masse sick leave requests, refusal to sign employment contracts, and refusal to attend mandatory workshops or perform extra-curricular duties (Blanc, 2019; Hale, 2019; Levine, 1970; Neriynck, 1968; Robert & Tyssens, 2008; Scribner, 2015). Yet most of the research on teacher actions focuses on teacher strikes that occurred in industrialized northern cities such as Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia (Hale, 2019) or other sites with strong histories of organized labor (Scribner, 2015, August). This pattern is worth noting because the actions took place in major cities where the teaching

force is typically larger and has more political power (Scribner, 2015) or, like in Chicago, has a long labor history. It also sheds light on the sparse scholarship available regarding teacher work actions in other regions.

During 2018, a number of walkouts occurred nationally. Some, like Blanc (2019), an activist and journalist, described these events as a "red-state revolt" among educators and stakeholders in socially and politically conservative states as a reflection of state legislatures "prioritizing big business over working people" (Blanc, 2019, p. 27; Pearce, 2018). As a result of this prioritizing, education stakeholders in these states protested funding cuts that affected the quality of children's education, deskilling, increased testing and bureaucracy, changes in pensions, inadequate salaries, increased class-sizes, market-based reforms, and the culture of teacher blame saturating national rhetoric. Tensions between education stakeholders and state legislatures began to build and people began to take action. In late February 2018, West Virginia led the wave of national action with a strike that resulted in promising gains that inspired education stakeholders elsewhere in the country. As national media coverage increased the visibility of West Virginia's education and labor concerns and the collective action stakeholders were willing to take, educational advocates in other states across the United States took notice and started planning. Both local grass-roots activism rooted in diverse activist causes and union organizing contributed to the Oklahoma Walkout events.

The Walkout was an important effort for education stakeholders to voice their concerns. In addition to national forces, various local forces contributed to the Walkout. In this chapter, I will first discuss the economic roots to neoliberalism and its influence on socio-political thought and discourse that shapes the current context. I will focus on its

influence on the type of policy and legislation related to public education and teachers. I will then address how this ideology impacts teachers within a socio-political system that oftentimes works against public education. I incorporate select accounts from Walkout participants within this section to provide glimpses into the event's historical significance. The continued struggle between neoliberal socio-political thought and practices and preserving democratic aims of public schools poses multiple tensions for the education profession. I will also provide information on Oklahoma's right to work laws and the Oklahoma Education Association (OEA) as the state's largest teachers' union. The conditions in Oklahoma, influential for the Walkout, lessen the power of teacher unions and their ability to effectively organize around mass action which further limits the collective voice of educators and other stakeholders. These factors provide insights into the events that led up to, during, and after the Walkout in this state, the participants' decision to walk out, and the ways they framed their participation.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberal ideology, rooted in economic theory, became a dominant framework nationally in the early 1980s and worked its way to Oklahoma in the 1990s. Major ideas regarding society, politics, and economics are organized into a structured set of ideas called ideology (Fowler, 2009). Isaac (1987) defines ideology as a "fairly coherent set of values and beliefs about the way the social, economic, and political systems should be organized and operated and recommendations about how these values and beliefs should be put into effect" (as cited in Fowler, 2009, p. 122). In this section, I briefly discuss the economic components of neoliberalism that in turn shapes the socio-political landscape.

Some scholars have argued the socio-political climate and the culture of financial austerity shaping public education fueled Oklahoma's Walkout (Blanc, 2019).

Economic Influence

Both an economic theory and a cultural ideology, neoliberalism accepts the "basic soundness of capitalism" (Fowler, 2009, p. 125; Saltman, 2014). David Harvey (2005), an anthropologist and geographer, wrote a well-known text on the topic called *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. In this account, Harvey defines neoliberalism as the theory that "human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual skills and entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (p. 2). In more explicitly critical terms, Gerson (2004) describes neoliberalism as "society for profit masquerading as 'individual initiative'" (p. 98). Lipman (2011), an educational policy scholar, further defines it as:

> an ensemble of economic and social policies, forms of governance, and discourses and ideologies that promote individual self-interest, unrestricted flows of capital, deep reductions in the cost of labor, and sharp retrenchment of the public sphere ... privatization of social goods and withdrawal of government from provision for social welfare on the premise that competitive markets are more effective and efficient (p. 6).

Neoliberalism represents a break with the Keynesian economic tradition, state-interventionist policies, that governed from the 1940s until 1970s (Lipman, 2011; Saltman, 2014; Thorsen & Lie, n.d.) and is often associated with the economic policies and practices of Great Britain's Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and U.S. President

Ronald Reagan. During the timeframe in which Keynesian was the dominant economic approach, economists assumed that to counter capitalist markets' fluctuations required the government to stimulate the consumer base to support spending on public sector goods and services (Saltman, 2014). Another Keynesian goal was full employment and reducing poverty which would shrink the wealth gap (Thorsen & Lie, n.d.).

In the last few decades, American economics has shifted to neoliberal thought which also molds politics and public education at the state level. As an economic doctrine, neoliberalism counters Keynesian ideology by calling for privatizing public goods and services, including education, and deregulating government controls over markets and labor. This principle emphasizes economic growth (Fowler, 2009) while upholding the belief that the government's most important role is through passing legislation which supports privatization and deregulation (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009).

Socio-Political Influences

Although initially an economic ideology, neoliberalism has grown to influence profoundly the current socio-political context. Critical education scholar Henry Giroux (2014) claims that neoliberalism is not only an ideology that moves through economic systems but also moves within the political realms. Watkins (2004) states "politics is the concentrated expression of economics" and neoliberalism has materialized as the dominant principle of governance (p. 14). Despite the term's varied uses (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009), for critical scholars, the dominance of neoliberalism as an ideology translates to increasing privatization and deepening corporate profits over meeting the material and personal needs of human beings (Blanc, 2019, p. 10). Neoliberalism encourages trade liberalization and the opening of national economics to foreign direct

investment in ways that critical scholars argue benefits wealthy nations and exploits the poor. Furthermore, Saltman (2014) argues that neoliberalism favors fiscal policies in rich nations designed to shift economic activity away from production and toward monetarist policy that aims for low inflation and economic growth to benefit corporations and investors. Harvey (2005) emphasizes the socio-economic class dimensions of neoliberalism, suggesting its roots in a political project intended to punish or reduce the power of the working-class worker. Similarly, Blanc (2019) describes the wave of teacher work actions as a resistance effort to the power reduction of the working-class.

However, as evidenced beginning in spring 2018 by multiple teachers' mobilizations nationally in "predominantly conservative states" with limited collective bargaining support, some are fighting for public education, its children, and the collective good, and against the austerity of neoliberalism (Everitt, 2020, p. 31). In this section, I will discuss how neoliberalism weaves through political and societal culture to emphasize efficiency and competition over the public good. In fact, the concept of the "public good" is an open question. D'Amico (2019) suggests that "definitions of the public" in these contemporary conditions "have grown increasingly narrow" (n.p.). I will also address how this mindset shaped politics and legislation in Oklahoma which served as a catalyst for educational stakeholders to take action in the 2018 Walkout.

Numerous national leaders in recent decades have embraced neoliberal thought. Modern societies disseminate ideologies through various channels including the education system which can reflect ideologically-driven education policy (Fowler, 2009, p. 122). Some of these ideals reflect different views of society. Margaret Thatcher, for example, said in 1987, "there is no such thing as society: there are individual men and

women, and there are families" (as cited in Lipman, 2011, p. 11). Thatcher's quote indicates an effort to "reconstruct values, social relations, and social identities" (Lipman, 2011, p. 10) around individual and family units rather than a social collective. It also reflects a belief that the government should not question or impede a person's accumulation of capital and/or wealth. In this view, those who amass economic capital do so because they are participating in a moral and logical undertaking to advance competition and free, efficient economic exchange. This is exemplified through legislation that render corporations equal to individuals and, then, in turn amplifies problematic wealth gaps between people and corporations (Rodriguez, 2015) which then leads to decreased funding for public social goods.

Some politicians and policy makers advance neoliberal thought through the social fabric in the form of legislation and policy. Lipman (2011) emphasizes that "policies are, in part, discourses – values, practices, ways of talking and acting – that shape consciousness and produce social identities" (p. 11). Since policy and legislation both reflect and shape politics and society, corporations and special interest groups pay close attention to, and help finance, political campaigns. They do so because they hope to elect politicians who will support and advance their special interests in the form of policy and legislation, in turn often serving the dominant class at the cost of protecting those with fewer resources (Fabricant & Fine, 2016, p. 467). This approach spurs legislation that lessens the tax burden of the wealthiest individuals and corporations and increases the burden of the lower- and middle-class. As corporations pay less and less, less money is then available to the state and therefore, funding for other public services decreases.

Within neoliberalism, privatizing public institutions such as prisons, hospitals, and schools is a just and worthy cause (Apple, 2016). Using the concept of economic rationality justifies removing public monies from what are constructed as "failing" public institutions and placing money into private systems. However, critical scholars have argued that these reforms, under the pretext of assisting, further allow segregation, labeling, and inequality based on race, gender, ability, socio-economic status, along with other factors. Critical education scholar Michael Apple (2016) claims, "the entire project of neoliberalism is connected to a larger process of exporting blame from the decisions of dominant groups onto the state and onto poor people" (p. 259). Berliner (2016) notes close correlations between a nation's level of income equality and student academic performance. For example, a nation with low income inequality has a higher student academic performance rate. As of 2020, the United States has the largest level of income inequality of any wealthy nation in the world, with the wealth and power concentrated among selected groups, individuals, and corporations (Thorsen & Lie, n.d.; Wilkinson & Pickett as cited in Berliner, 2016, p. 475). Yet, it is clear that individuals cannot be held fully accountable for their performance when the disassembling of federal and state programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, unemployment benefits, and public education so seriously affect those who are vulnerable.

Neoliberalism in theory has differed from neoliberalism in practice. Dominant in both U.S. mainstream political parties, neoliberalism invests in and fosters an open market approach to the governing role of the state while parsing the state's caregiving role. Neoliberalism affects all political parties. In the late 1970s, President Jimmy Carter's administration and various Democratic city-and state-wide governments began

shifting to neoliberal approaches (Blanc, 2019). Conservative proponents of the ideology and economic system, such as President Reagan and President George W. Bush, presided over expanding federal spending of military growth, policing, and corporate subsidies yet reduced spending on social services (Saltman, 2014). Under Clinton's presidency a variety of changes led to dismantling welfare and undermining labor unions through various trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Blanc, 2009; Saltman, 2014). Presidents Bush and Obama also focused on subsidizing the Wall Street banks by giving them trillions of dollars in handouts, near-zero interest loans, and loan guarantees (Gerson, 2004, p. 99).

Oklahoma

Oklahoma legislatures have mirrored neoliberal principles through their support of government incentives, such as tax breaks or subsidies to cover the cost of doing business in the state. Some refer to this practice as "corporate welfare" which can impact funding streams from such public services as education. This legislative pattern connects to Oklahoma's education system in several ways. Matt, a Walkout participant, stated:

> From all of the cuts that the state had made to education funding to the impact at our local school districts where we've been eliminating positions left and right for years and we've seen class sizes then go up and teachers feel that frustration of that – Why are my classes so large? How do you expect me to do the job I'm supposed to do with so many kids in here? – And the response [from legislators] has been – Well, you know, funding.
>
> And so, over about a ten year period, it has reached a point of frustration where we've had numerous elections where we've tried to get the best candidates elected

> that will make education a priority and the state has chosen to maintain the status quo for the last ten years and continue the cuts which has made our jobs much more difficult.

As Matt continued, he addressed Oklahoma's conservative spending habits with sarcasm:

> I think Oklahoma likes the status quo. I think Oklahoma feels comfortable. Oklahoma, I think, takes pride in the fact that we are a conservative state. That we are a Republican state. And we hold those fiscal, conservative Republican values that are core and that means that we've go to eliminate as much government spending as we can. For over, well actually, about ten years, you've heard about how evil the government is and the government collects so much of your taxes. And yeah, they're right. My taxes go up so somebody is wasting my tax dollars, so we need to crack down and do something about that. Candidates are elected that say – Hey, we're going to cut your taxes. We are going to be fiscally responsible. _ And so, people like that and they think – Oh, it's not my school. My school is not the problem. It's all those other schools that are out there. So, we need to get more people *like my guy* elected who will get our financial spending under control.

Oklahoma's legislative relationship with the oil and gas companies, if taxed fairly, would result in substantial revenue for the state and ultimately for public education. Until 2018, Oklahoma legislators refused to raise the state's gross production tax more than 5%. Corporations paying few to no taxes further drove budget shortfalls and resulted in decreased funding for education and other public services. Blanc (2019) contends that the oil and gas tax rate in Oklahoma was the lowest in the nation prior to the Walkout

despite the state being one of the largest producers of these resources (p. 27). Also notable is that the Oklahoma legislatures had not raised taxes since 1990. Also, since 2000, the Oklahoma legislature pushed other tax cuts that, as Blanc (2019) noted, resulted in $1 billion in yearly lost revenue for the state (p. 27). Some Walkout participants, like Matt's account demonstrates, were aware of the neoliberal influence on the history of austerity in the state and its effects on schools.

A series of tax cuts beginning in 2004 laid the foundation to the Walkout. Oklahoma began seeing its first major tax cuts for corporations under Governor Brad Henry and a Democratic-led Senate (Blanc, 2019). Since 2004, Oklahoma policies and legislation favored the elite by cutting personal income taxes and removing estate and capital gains taxes. Oil and gas industries and billionaires, Harold Hamm and T. Boone Pickens, donated to Governor Mary Fallin's republican campaigns that, in turn, resulted in developing policies favoring wealthy individuals and corporations. For example, Oklahoma politicians offered preferential treatment to the state's oil and gas companies by allowing only 2% taxation on new wells in the first 3 years of drilling. As the state practiced this form of corporate welfare, a term originating with Ralph Nader, political activist, and popularized in 1994 by Robert Reich, as secretary of labor (Weisberg, 1997, para. 1), it cut education by nearly 28% and pushed policy and legislation to privatize public education. In the wake of continual budget cuts to the schools, Oklahoma began to implement four-day school weeks in some schools in 2016 because they could not afford to fund all 5 days. By the time of the Walkout (April, 2018), 18% of the 512 school districts in Oklahoma moved to four-day school weeks (Blanc, 2019) increasing pressures on teachers and undercutting students' time with teachers.

As each legislative session passed with less education funding, additional "dubious educational reforms" (Montaño, et al., 2002, p. 265), and broken promises, the pressure among teachers, taxpayers, parents, and communities began to slowly build.

Neoliberalism's Influence on Public Education

In this section, I discuss how neoliberalism shapes public education even as the system remains one of the last "democratically distributed public goods in the United States" (Blanc, 2019, p 9). By shifting the purpose of education from "a social good for the development of individuals and society as a whole" to "human capital development" (Lipman, 2011, pp. 14-15), competitive market mentality extends and embeds into social, political, and economic practices -- essentially all areas of life -- and public education "moves from democratic citizenship into the realm of labor market preparation" (Lipman, 2011, p. 14; Springer et al., 2016, p. 2). In today's political landscape, neoliberal thought contributes to deregulating, privatizing, and cutting spending on public services, including public education. By directing policies and schools to train future workers, educators take on a major role in that labor market preparation (Blanc, 2019).

During Reagan's presidency (1981-89), the federally commissioned *A Nation at Risk* report was used to redefine key education issues by focusing not on access and equity but rather increased rigor, standardization, and the vague term of "excellence" (Fowler, 2009, p. 16; Nuñez et al., 2015). The report triggered a sense of education crisis by claiming U.S. graduates were ill-prepared to compete on a global market (Fowler, 2009). The quest for education excellence at the federal level spurred states to launch numerous reforms such as graduation requirements, proficiency tests, career ladders, and school choice. Business and political leaders joined the charge by adding merit pay for

teachers, national curriculum, standards, and tests, and up-to-date technologies to the list of desired education reforms (Fowler, 2009).

Another outcome of the neoliberal infusion into the education system was academic labeling. Federal and state governments' requirements for schools to sort, track, and channel students based on demographics, socio-economics, or standardized testing scores results in labeling students (Rist, 2016). In turn, first-rate educational experiences may be lessened for students identified as "English Learner," "Title I," or "High-Risk" (Avelar & Johnson, 2018). Labeling students plays a role in determining their academic achievement and potential progress. Becker (1963) suggests a student may begin to self-identify with a label and this enmeshment impacts academic potential (Avelar & Johnson, 2018, para. 2). Rist (2016) also states that labels shape a teacher's expectations of a student's ability and their achievement or lack thereof.

Privatization of education is achieved through a range of ways, including school choice and voucher legislation which allows private schools or private charters to use public monies from education funds. Showcasing the perceived "failures" of the public schools system then diminishes the power of the teachers' unions typically through some national but mostly state legislation (Blanc, 2019; Everitt, 2020). Education reformers seek to improve public education and focus on "high dropout rates, low test scores, and lagging performance" perceived to characterize public education (Nuñez et. al, 2015, p. xv). This increases the lure of privatization. Typically, reform measures at the national level and sometimes state level concentrate on closing achievement gaps at public schools with high poverty rates and diverse student populations. They de-emphasize the

influence of social factors such as family social class status and income inequality for student experience and performance (Everitt, 2020; Nuñez et al., 2015, p. xv).

Yet Gerson (2004) contends that "no campaign to 'close the achievement gap' can succeed if it does not make its main priority to close the poverty gap" (p. 104). Although leaders sometimes frame this reform movement as an altruistic effort to help all students succeed – especially the marginalized populations attending schools with below average standardized test scores – it contributes to privatizing public services and extending its capitalistic, free-market mentality into the public service arenas. The decrease in public funding for schools, in turn, increases pressure, class sizes, teaching load, and bureaucratic trivia for educational workers. Susanna, a Walkout participant and elementary special ed teacher in an urban school district, addressed this when she stated,

> A lot of it has to do with funding but it also has to do with, like the woman who is my boss over me, [supervisor's name]. She had that position, was in charge of, I think, four schools three years ago and now, it is 21. So, she either visits one school or pays attention to emails once a day. So, we haven't, you know, and they're just always saying – Well, do the behavior plans. – And we do all of those things and we're at the end of the year now and it's. I've have announced we've got too many kids and many more kids now than we had. And we're not supposed to be pulling more than 12 [students] at a time and we're pulling 15 to 20 kids at a time and there's so many kids, we're really not getting anything done.
>
> I mean, I told my principal the other day, I said – Just so you know, academically this year has been a waste of time because mostly, what I do. My room is just a soft place for them to land. I have a number of kids who are always exhausted

> because they're up late at night or taking care of themselves or siblings or whatever and they can come and crash in my room any time. And so, I feel like I'm being useful to them but it's just. It's just crazy.
>
> And so we still keep getting more…kids and even at this point, if we were allocated another teacher, there is not another space in this school. So, where would that teacher be?

As education reforms seeped into the Oklahoma political landscape, legislators systematically created policies and legislation supporting high-stakes testing, classroom defunding, and privatization. For the nine-year period between 2008 and 2017, for example, the state cut teaching funding for each pupil by 28% (Blanc, 2019, p. 26) and some teachers worked second jobs (also see Blair, 2018). On narrator, Jennie, discussed how she accepted a pay cut to come to Oklahoma and teach. She said,

> I started [in another state] and when I wanted to come, move closer to family, I did all of my research [and] realized I was taking a $10,000 pay cut. The orientation day, I realized that to insure my family of four, I was going to have almost $1,200 deducted from my paycheck. So, that was a pay cut that I had not been anticipating. So, the whole budget was almost shot. I had tears in my eyes, and I asked—Does Oklahoma just hate teachers? – It's hard to help people working in Oklahoma to understand exactly how far behind we are in resources. Not just human resources but physical resources. So, knowing what it could look like and what it should look like has been very hard for me in Oklahoma

Also, the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) granted nearly 2,000 emergency-certified teaching certificates in 2017 leaving some staff with no teaching

degrees and little to no training (Blanc, 2019), a contentious issue that educators and educational scholars have noted for years. As a result, school districts bore the fiscal responsibility for providing support and training for the emergency-certified teachers during a wave of state funding cuts. The long history of tensions about teacher professionalism and teacher blame (D'Amico Pawlewicz, 2020) surfaced again; Blanc (2019) notes that teachers felt continually deprofessionalized in these circumstances. Some Oklahoma educators believed they faced legislative neglect through defunding, disrespect, and deprofessionalization and were no longer willing to accept expectations of doing more with less. For the first time in over 30 years, some educators were willing to leave their classrooms for multiple, consecutive days and go to the Oklahoma Capitol to demand salary increases but most importantly to them, adequate funding levels for public education to meet their students' needs.

Unions Shaping of Oklahoma's Education

In this section, I will address how the power of teacher unions and their ability to effectively organize around mass action has changed in recent years. This change provides insights into the events surrounding the Walkout in the Oklahoma context. The Oklahoma Walkout is part of the broader historical landscape of teacher activism in current years, including the Red State Revolt, as previously noted. For the purposes of this study, I focus on the state's largest teacher's union, OEA, which is affiliated with National Education Association (NEA). In particular, I also discuss OEA's challenges to organize within its local affiliates' while also protecting those locals who have limited bargaining rights. Nearly 40% of the state's teachers belong to a local association that is affiliated with OEA and NEA (Blanc, 2019). It is worth noting that Oklahoma has two

other organizational options for educators that had limited roles in the Walkout. The first is the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) concentrated in Oklahoma City Public Schools and Professional Oklahoma Educators (POE) which dominates rural Oklahoma. The AFT holds a strong labor and collective bargaining emphasis which enables a role of allyship for political endeavors and vice-versa. The mission statement of POE describes it as a bipartisan organization that offers an alternative to a union. Accordingly, POE neither contributes to nor supports political campaigns and refers to its organization as non-union ("About POE", n.d.). In fact, POE did not support nor condone the Walkout ("About POE", n.d.).

Teachers unions, such as NEA and AFT, are highly visible on a national level with a combined membership of nearly 5 million members composed of certified teachers, other school employees, retired educators, education students, and college faculty and staff (Winkler et al., 2012, p. 15). Teachers unions offer spaces that can foster educators' collective voice against the multitude of education reforms. However, advocates of education reforms suggest the nation's teachers' unions squash progress and maintain the education 'status quo' (Coulson, 2010, p. 155; Meier, 2004, p. 51; Winkler et al., 2012). Reformers believe unions use their power to protect teacher interests and block policies that would enrich student prospects (Winkler et al., 2012, p. 8). Yet unions counter this stance with the common phrasing that "students' learning conditions are teachers' working conditions" and when conditions improve for one, it improves for the other (Nuñez et al., 2015, p. 36). Meier (2004) states that unions give a respected and dignified voice to teachers who are closest to the action; this, in turn, offers the public insights into what does and does not work in the classroom (p. 54). Before, during, and

after the Walkout, Oklahoma's teachers used their voices from within and outside of union affiliations. OEA, working in conjunction with NEA, provided the organizing and monetary force to move the Walkout from a virtual conversation into a physical reality. Grass roots activism also contributed to the collective action, which I address in Chapter V.

National Level

In this section, I provide a brief history of the NEA to contextualize its ongoing support of its state affiliates, such as OEA, throughout the years, including the Walkout. During the Walkout, NEA supplied funding and additional staffing to assist the OEA with the organizing and logistics associated with sustaining a large assembly. By supplying the structures to the Walkout, such as shuttle rides, permits, porta-potties, speaker systems, participants were able to become involved in the event without the tedium, confusion, and obstacles of logistical planning. Although Walkout participants noted many of these material provisions in the Walkout, few knew or articulated the NEA or OEA's role in providing these resources. This absence of acknowledgement speaks to a lack of understanding of the union's role during the Walkout.

The NEA started in 1857 to reform and expand education with a united voice (Holcomb, 2006/January). The NEA has supported issues that range from advocating for educator rights and working conditions to issues impacting student success. For example, after the Civil War, NEA raised federal aid to reconstruct schools in the South. In 1867, NEA lobbied Congress to establish the Department of Education and later, in 1966, NEA merged with the American Teachers Association. For more than a century, NEA has continued to advocate for teacher salaries, working conditions, and pensions. Many

times, the organization's teacher advocacy has focused on the need for multicultural/multilingual classroom resources and a resistance to increased paperwork and testing and forced curriculum expansions (Holcomb, 2006/February & March). NEA has over 3 million members and has acquired vast amounts of resources used to increase their political influence with key decision makers (Holcomb, 2006/April). As evidenced by NEA's support of the Oklahoma Walkout, and elsewhere, NEA's mission holds that improving the quality of schools and the quality of the profession requires collective action.

State Level – Oklahoma

The OEA, a state affiliate of the NEA, engages in organizing and lobbying work for public education and its students and educators in Oklahoma. With support from NEA, the OEA provided key staffing and logistics over the nine-day period of the Walkout and coordinated with superintendents and school districts to maintain local collective bargaining rights. The OEA originated as the Oklahoma Teachers' Association (OTA) in 1889 in Guthrie, Oklahoma six months after the Land Run (Crowder, n.d.). In 1903, OTA became involved with NEA and work began to increase teachers' salaries and school funding, to provide a teacher retirement system, and to provide the quality public education for students but did not become an NEA affiliate until 1974 (Crowder, n.d.). The Indian Territory Teachers' Association joined OTA in 1906, and in 1918, OTA renamed to the Oklahoma Education (Crowder, n.d.) as it is known today. OEA works with local and state governmental agencies and the state and federal legislatures to attempt to shape the teaching profession.

The OEA actions on behalf of teachers have taken varied forms. One example is the 1943 firing of Muskogee's teacher, Kate Frank, due to her work to unseat several school board members. Her battle triggered NEA to create a defense fund that to this day provides money to members across the United States to fight members' rights cases (Crowder, n.d.). In 1965 and 1968, OEA imposed sanctions against the state due to inadequate funding for public schools which led then OEA President, Gladys Nun, to encourage teachers to resign en masse to influence the state legislature (Crowder, n.d.). OEA secured the Education Reform Act in 1980 which included a teacher-mentor program and teacher designed staff development (Crowder, n.d.). They secured, in 1987, due process for support. In 1990, OEA supported a four-day walkout that resulted in the Educational Reform Act commonly referred to as House Bill 1017 (HB1017) (Crowder, n.d.). HB1017 implemented policy reform that established a state minimum salary schedule for teachers, reduced class sizes and created funding equity along with other policy reforms (Oklahoma Policy Institute, 2019, July 11). Also, Crowder (n.d.) notes that in 2000, OEA helped secure fully paid, individual health insurance for all school employees. As of this writing in 2020, OEA has nearly 40,000 members, composed of public school classroom teachers, coaches, counselors, librarians, and administrators along with support personnel, education majors who attend Oklahoma colleges and universities, and retired teachers (OEA, n.d.)

Understanding the impact of collective bargaining and right-to-work tenets in Oklahoma is important for contextualizing the Walkout. According to Winkler et al. (2015), Oklahoma's teacher unions are weaker than most other states in part because of limited collective bargaining laws which allow, but do not require, bargaining. Also,

Oklahoma State Questions 695 (SQ695), known as the Oklahoma Right to Work Amendment, was approved in a September 2001 special election (Creel, n.d.). As a right-to-work state, also influenced by the U.S. Supreme Court *Janus* decision in 2018, Oklahoma does not allow teachers unions to collect agency fees from non-members (Blanc, 2019; Creel, n.d.; Winkler et al., 2015). One law also prevents a teacher strike (Winkler et al., 2015, p. 278). Notably, only 40% of Oklahoma educators belong to a union (Blanc, 2019, p. 59). These contextual factors must be taken into account when considering job actions, such as staging a "sick out" or walkout in this state, because the consequences of taking action against the school board could mean the loss of collective bargaining and decertification for local associations. In fact, OEA worked closely with locals and school districts across the state to ensure districts would not take action against Walkout participants. Cal, an OEA staff member and participant in this study, addressed the collaborative effort to make the Walkout happen when he stated,

> When school started [referring to August 2017], me and my fellow cohorts on the southeast team literally traveled the entire southeast talking to superintendents about this; getting them ready to speak to their boards about the possibility of this happening. So, we had been communicating ever since the first meeting that we had in the summer [2017] about this. CCOSA [Cooperative Council for Oklahoma School Administration], the superintendents and administrators' union, OSSBA [Oklahoma State School Boards Association], the union for our school board members, are on the education coalition *with us* [referencing OEA]. They were working with us.

Cal stressed the importance of working with other education organizations to protect locals and its bargaining rights. However, narrators' accounts varied in reflecting the contextual factors of a right-to-work state. Some narrators were aware of the state's statutes on strikes while others were not.

The Union Model in a Right-to-Work State

Although federal law governs labor relations in the United States, the Taft-Hartley Labor Act in 1947 allowed states to adopt right-to-work laws (Creel, n.d.). Right-to-work laws prohibit union membership as a term or condition of employment (Creel, n.d.). Essentially, this means that employees may opt out of joining a union without affecting their employment. In the 27 states that have right-to-work laws, union membership is 6.5% of the workforce in contrast to the other states where union membership is 13.9% of the workforce (Combs, 2019). In right-to-states, union membership is lower, which means fewer opportunities for collective action. Also, in right-to-work states like Oklahoma, educators, and sometimes the public, view the union through the service model lens. In this service view, they ask, "what can the union do for me"? This makes organizing based on issues, rather than individuals, difficult at times because there are limited rank-and-file members (ordinary members of an organization who are not leaders) with experience and understanding regarding effective mobilization and action within the parameters of these state laws. This section provides context of the service-model mindset and how it shapes the rank-and-file members' understanding of organizing around collective action and its implications on the Walkout.

Before neoliberalism took hold nationally, corporations and the states were able to expand public services and offer moderate wage increases in exchange for labor peace

(Gerson, 2004, p. 101). This included teachers' unions. Collective bargaining is permitted in Oklahoma with limiting factors, such as strike prohibitions (Blanc, 2019). At the same time, the scope of the union's work narrows with a focus on having a "seat at the table" through collective bargaining, lobbying, and electing supportive political candidates (Blanc, 2019, p.38). In turn, the union places less focus on collective power, resistance and workplace fights (Blanc, 2019). As a result, educators turned to grassroots social media groups for initial communications and mobilizing efforts when tensions began building toward the Walkout.

The weak organizing mindset prevalent in Oklahoma has created difficulties at times in state labor history in mobilizing union members and nonmembers at the local levels. For many decades, OEA members had viewed the union as providing them only with services through legal protections and representation. Most educators viewed OEA political lobbying as a service on behalf of all educators and public education -- not just OEA members. Although OEA had begun a three-year campaign, *Together We're Stronger,* (TWS), in the summer of 2017, to increase teachers and support personnel salaries and classroom funding along with a cost-of-living allowance (COLA) for retired teachers, the communication about this campaign had been limited to OEA staff, board of directors, local association leaders, and some district superintendents. A limited number of rank-and-file members knew about the TWS campaign. The OEA's missed opportunity for early communication about TWS with membership led to miscommunication among OEA, social media groups, and educators around the state, both before and during the Walkout. Some Walkout participants reflected on these

tensions in their accounts. Cal spoke about the miscommunication among OEA, CCOSA, OSSBA, and those organizations members when he said,

> They [referencing CCOSA and OSSBA] were supposed to be getting out information to their members. Now, if we [referencing OEA] were doing that and CCOSA and OSSBA were doing, the communication was happening. But, it started to, it didn't spread like we really wanted it to. I think a lot of that has to do with politics and fear on the administrative levels. They're scared that they're going to offend somebody and possibly lose their position, their career. So, we tried as hard as we could to get that communication going and did everything humanly possible but still, in today's age, that's not enough for some people and we wish it could have been better.

The initial conversations with superintendents intensified discussions about the potential of a work action, such as a walkout, if the legislature did not meet education needs.

In the fall of 2017, organizers and OEA members had not sufficiently informed locals about the organizing campaign prior to the Walkout. Therefore, most of the membership and stakeholders had limited knowledge or understanding of the campaign that began summer 2017 to advance pay increases and classroom funding. Non-members acknowledged OEA's lobbying efforts but were unaware of the details of the TWS campaign because OEA did not publicize it until shortly before the Walkout. OEA was forced to accelerate the Walkout timeline due to outside pressure from grassroots groups. These complexities resulted in missed opportunities for locals, activists, and member leaders to build valued relationships to create a more cohesive statewide effort. It is also important to note that leaders, activists, and members of those grassroots organizations

had limited wide scale organizing experience or resources to support a state-wide action (Blanc, 2019, p. 145) and were therefore dependent on OEA for logistical and organizing support.

Also, bipartisan ideology creates additional ramifications for teachers' unions (Gerson, 2004) when the union works to foster bipartisan, political relationships through lobbying efforts which in turn, can make acts of resistance, such as the Walkout, difficult on those relationships. Historically teachers' unions have closely aligned to the Democratic Party offering endorsements, campaign monies, and public support (Gerson, 2004). For example, since 1990, the National Education Association (NEA) "contributed 93 percent of $30 million to Democrats or the Democratic Party" whereas, similarly, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) "contributed 99 percent of $26 million to the Democratic Party" (Coulson, 2010, p. 155). This level of political campaign funding equates to "roughly as much as Chevron, Exxon, Mobil, the NRA, and Lockheed Martin" combined (Coulson, 2010, p. 162). Notably, in Oklahoma, OEA membership is roughly 50 percent Democrat and 50 percent Republican. This nearly even split in OEA membership has been cause for contention when NEA or OEA recommends political candidates. However, in the event of the Walkout, most members and nonmembers viewed funding education as nonpartisan and took issue with legislators making education bipartisan, which I address in greater detail in Chapter V.

State Actions Leading to the Walkout

"It was an educator movement but it was so much more than that. It was people really putting validity to the work that we were doing because we care about students and the

message was the right message. We're doing this for our kids." (Cari, Walkout participant)

Since 2008, Oklahoma educators navigated the political landscape of continued funding cuts to classrooms, broken promises of pay raises, and senseless education reforms that impeded a focus on teaching. Further, the state faced a critical teacher shortage as many left the profession or moved to surrounding states for better pay and support. By the end of the 2017 legislative session, educators felt burdened financially, emotionally, and physically. In this section, I address key bills, policies and politics that shaped Oklahoma's education system and amplified teachers' frustrations building to the Walkout. I will also discuss the role of social media in Oklahoma and elsewhere in relation to the Walkout.

Precursor to the Walkout: Oklahoma House Bill 1017 (HB1017) (1990)

Frustrations with the legislature's lack of education funding is not new. In April 1990, the OEA rallied teachers to go to Oklahoma's state Capitol and lobby legislators in support of House Bill 1017 (HB1017). Heralded as landmark legislation in Oklahoma, HB1017, also known as the Education Reform Act of 1990, called for funding a wide range of education initiatives by increasing personal income and sales taxes (Felder, 2016.). Authored by the 1990 Speaker of the House and a Democratic gubernatorial candidate, Steve Lewis, the bill intended to appropriate more than $560 million over five years to a wide range of reform policies. These policies included smaller class sizes, an increase in minimum teacher salaries, funding equity, early childhood programs, school consolidation, new statewide curriculum standards, and statewide testing (Felder, 2016.). Teachers, business owners, and state citizens believed students' inadequate educational

achievement was decreasing the state's opportunity for economic growth due to more than $80 million in funding shortfalls in three consecutive years prior to HB1017 (Felder, 2016

). Educators believed HB1017 was a beacon of hope and called on the legislators to take action through walking off the job for four rainy days in April. And it worked. Oklahoma Governor Henry Bellmon signed HB1017 into law on April 24, 1990.

A few of the study's narrators had also participated in 1990. Mike, an OEA staff member, was serving as a local leader and member during the HB1017 walkout. As he reflected, he shared about his experience in 1990:

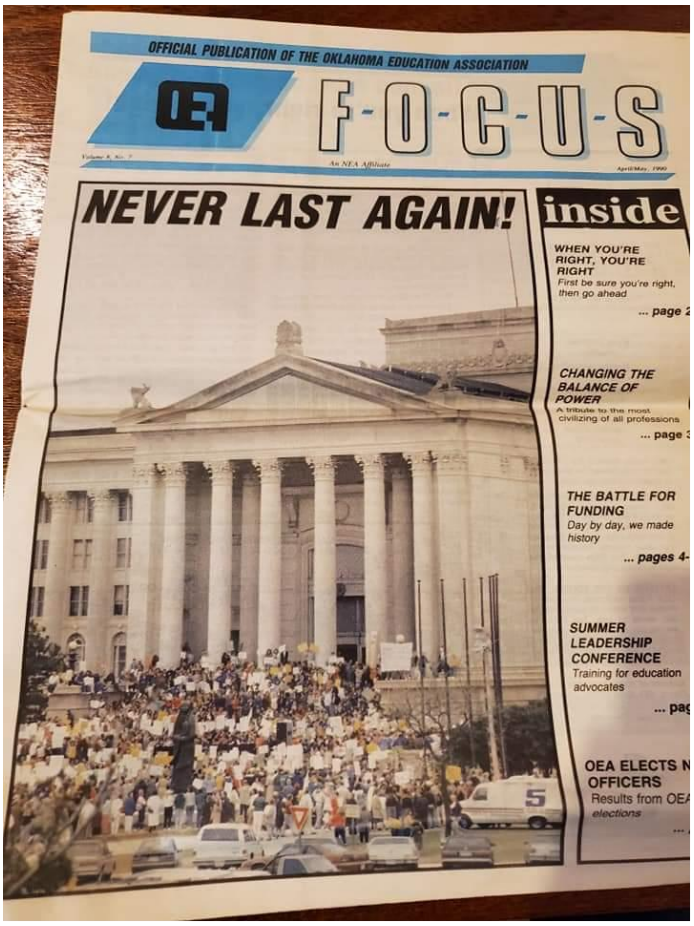
> I had been on the board and we walked, at that point, to have the revenue bill passed for that. It was at that point that I think things really amped up for education. It was very soon after that that funding basically stopped for public education in the state and for at least the last 10 years there has been almost *no* additional money put into public education.

As Mike continued, he shared about the quick turnaround to make the 1990 walkout a reality.

> It happened very quickly. However, there was not or did not appear to be much planning. I think our leader at the time was president of the association [OEA], Kyle Dahlem. And…it was the Thursday or Friday before Easter. I literally got a phone call at my school and that was before cell phones or really even phones in classrooms. …(T)he secretary of our school came to our room and said the principal had asked me to come to the office to take an important phone call. So, I did. And it was our president [OEA President, Kyle Dahlem] simply saying –

> Mike, you need to get into your locals as quickly as possible. You know, especially the largest ones in the area. That would be Enid, Ponca City, and Stillwater and talk to them about we're going to close school on this Monday. - Which happened to be the Monday after Easter, I believe [*Oh, wow*]. So, it was a crazy weekend. And it happened very quickly. And that was the lead up to it. It ended up the first day out of, I don't remember how many we were there. It was a good showing. Not great. And it grew every day. Went on for four days and by the last day, I think, we had some 30,000 at the Capitol.

Educators believed their actions were a step in the right direction. Linda Grimes, a Bristow elementary teacher who participated in the 1990 event, stated, "the step we took may have been small when you look at what our schools need, but at least it was a step forward. We've been standing still and sliding backwards here for so long" ("An Example for the Nation", 1990, August, p. 1).



(*Figure 1, 1990 Headline a.k.a. Sometimes Things Never Change, OEA Focus, 1990)*

However, the victory with the new legislation was quickly overshadowed with the repeal efforts of State Question 639 (SQ639) calling to halt HB1017 because of the tax increases it posed. The OEA moved into action calling on its membership to take grassroots action to defeat SQ639 at the ballot box. Steve Lewis said:

> We've won a big battle, but the war is still raging. The hopes and dreams of a lot of people are still on the line. The supporters of education reform must remain vigilant. The most important things right now are to defeat any repeal initiatives and to elect a Governor who is committed to making education the highest priority ("Strong.United.Proud",1990, April, p.1).

The OEA President at the time, Kyle Dahlem, was confident the public supported the efforts to defeat SQ639 and to implement HB1017 even if it meant raising taxes ("OEA moves to stop STOP: Coalitions continue to support HB1017", 1990, August, p. 1) and she was right. OEA supported the Lewis gubernatorial campaign and when he lost in the primary, OEA endorsed David Walters who won office in November 1990. OEA made it clear with the successful passage of HB1017 and the election of pro-public education candidates that "quick fixes" and poorly crafted plans were not in the best interest of Oklahoma's children and classrooms ("You make a difference", 1990, August, p. 1) and that every political decision impacts the classroom. The 43rd Oklahoma Legislature had a Democratic governor and lieutenant governor along with a senate majority of 75% Democrats and a house majority of 66.3% Democrats.

After years of education budget cuts, the passage of HB1017 and the defeat of its referendum in SQ639 (1991) gave hope to Oklahoma's educators working to increase resources in the education system. Unfortunately, these actions did not silence the group that formed SQ639. The legislature formed and passed a voter initiative in 1992, State Question 640 (SQ640), requiring a 75% supermajority from the Oklahoma House and the Oklahoma Senate to pass legislation to increase taxes (Carlson, 2018, April). Its passage set the stage to erode HB1017 and impede new funding for Oklahoma and ultimately education. Linda R., a participant of both historical walkouts, reflected on the 1990 work action and stated,

> …we walked around the Capitol. Rain or shine. Went through that difficult time. Some of the things we endured this time [referencing the 2018 Walkout] felt like great strides were made for the first time. However, that came with a price, too,

and it didn't solve the problem. Oklahoma seems to not want to get down to the real reasons to what the problem is.

The state's inability to address the real issues surrounding education paved the way to the Walkout.

Setting the Stage to the Walkout

Thirty years followed HB107 and SQ640 and Oklahoma faced failed economic policies and continued defunding of public education. Kevin, a participant who teaches AP English at the high school level, spoke about varied events that propelled the Walkout:

> I think the teacher walkout was effectively the culmination of educators more and more understanding the role that politicians were playing on their day-to-day reality and so, it took going back to kinda 2006 or 2008 and a series of tax cuts that the money to fund those tax cuts had to come from someplace and it started coming our of government agencies. I think it took about five years so, in the early twenty-teens for teachers to actually really understand what was happening to their day-to-day reality. And in some metro areas – Why are class sizes growing so substantively? And why [are there no] monies for things that I think in the past had been relatively available? Whether it was for professional development or some new piece of technology that somebody wanted to pilot in their classroom. You know, again, I'm probably thinking a little bit more for the metro but it took, I think, about five years before everybody really started to ask questions about why our day-do-day reality was getting so much more difficult.

Of course, that started happening not when districts were reducing our sub pay and not when districts were doubling up on bus routes. And those sorts of things, which had already been happening, but when we started really having to negotiate for step increases. It wasn't a given and when changes were being made within the scope of the contract, you know, compelling teachers to do duty and those sorts of things that before had been voluntary. Then I really think it took people a while to wake up and realize that the district wasn't being the jerks but that they're doing the best they could with the problems that were being created from above…the problems that we're seeing are originating with the state legislature. That our district's hands are actually tied [by broader political circumstances]. And that started a whole lot of push and a whole lore more activism and social engagement that culminated in (pause, followed with a sigh) 2015 and pushing into 2016 with a whole lot of pressure on the legislature to finally have to do something. I think that activism at the district level maybe but at the least, the person-to-person level significantly increased. And of course, there were a whole bunch of pieces of legislation in there that I think really caught people off guard. Things like banning AP U.S. History and changing retirement programs and, golly, you know, continued adjustments to evaluation instruments. You know, like a whole bunch of that stuff…not allowing professional association dues to be direct drafted. Like there were a whole lot of things that I think felt like, not only was the money being squeezed at the district level but, then there was a series of pieces of legislation that really felt like our competency as educators, and particularly when those pieces of legislation only targeted education and not our

> brother and sister organization, police or firefighters, who seemed to be governed by similar rules. Like all of that sort of culminated so that by 2015, there was this much more vocal push for something to be done and as that starts to build to a state question [referencing State Question 744], that would have been a $5,000 pay raise, that builds to the active recruitment of educators to run for office in 2016 to make sure there were fewer unopposed Republican primaries or Republican runners. All of that, I think, created a sense of awareness that simply hadn't existed in the previous ten years.
>
> And so, then you've got 2016 to the teacher walkout where, whether it was the state question that failed or a whole bunch of educators running for office but not actually getting elected, and then the abject paralysis of the state legislature to then, you know, pass a better plan. All of that, I think, just simply boiled over.

Between 2008 and 2017, the state's tax revenue diminished steadily as the state awarded tax breaks to oil companies and the state's top income earners which ultimately, as Blanc (2019) noted, resulted in a 28 percent reduction in funding for each student (McHenry-Sorber, 2018, April). Oklahoma also faced a teacher shortage. In 2017, the state awarded nearly 2,000 emergency certifications due to the large number of qualified educators leaving the profession or moving elsewhere, such as Texas, for more pay (Blanc, 2019; McHenry-Sober, 2018, April). The cuts led to Oklahoma teachers receiving the lowest pay in their region and being placed 49th in the national average pay, along with lacking classroom resources, unfunded state mandates, and four-day school weeks (McHenry-Sorber, 2018, April).

In the 2016-2017 legislative session, a revenue bill, Senate Bill 845 (SB845) was passed but later ruled unconstitutional by the Oklahoma Supreme Court. This ruling resulted in a budget shortfall which forced Governor Mary Fallin to call a special session on September 25, 2017 (Blatt, 2018). Governor Fallin included addressing the need for pay increases for K-12 public school teachers as part of her executive order for the special session. For several weeks of the special session, legislators did not convene due to reconstruction on the Capitol. This public display of legislature inaction fueled feelings of disappointment and frustration for education stakeholders (Blatt, 2018). Late in the special session, a comprehensive plan, House Bill 1035, nicknamed Plan A+ or the Grand Bargain, was introduced to the Oklahoma House committee but failed (Blatt, 2018). Then a mirrored measure, House Bill 1054, also failed by 5 votes to meet the required supermajority (Blatt, 2018). As the special session continued, House and Senate leaders began work on a new budget plan, House Bill 1019, which ended in Governor Fallin vetoing it. The special session adjourned in November with the governor promising to call a second special session to address the budget.

On December 15, 2017, Governor Fallin called the second special session that focused only on providing funding to the Oklahoma Health Care Authority (OHCA) in order to avoid provider rate cuts (Blatt, 2018) and was amended to include the features of the Step Up Oklahoma plan. The Step Up Oklahoma plan was created by a coalition of business and community leaders proposing recurring revenues totaling $750 million (Blatt, 2018, February). The main bill, House Bill 1033xx (HB1033xx), included a variety of cigarette/tobacco taxes, a tax increase on gross production, and a new tax on wind production. Drawing from a variety of financial sources, and designed by a

coalition, the plan held the promise of passing and of easing the education funding crisis (Blatt, 2018). It proposed a $5,000 raise for all teachers and principals, to address the budget shortfall, and generate an additional $367 million assisting in funding essential services and stabilizing the state's budget.

The second special session reconvened on February 5, 2018 and ran concurrently with the 2018 56th Oklahoma Legislative Session (Blatt, 2018). On February 12, 2018, the main bill, House Bill 1033xx (HB1033xx) of the Step Up Plan failed to meet the required supermajority. Hundreds of educators and stakeholders were on site at the Capitol to witness its defeat. This second legislative dismissal of education funding caused concern among education groups, such as the OEA, Oklahoma State School Board Association (OSSBA), and Cooperative Council for Oklahoma School Administration (CCOSA). They anticipated that elected officials would continue to ignore their requests and that education funding would continue to face cuts. Leaders from among vested organizations as part of the Oklahoma Education Coalition began discussions for work action to take place at the end of April or early May 2018.

Social Media's Influence on the Walkout

Social media played a significant role on virtual mobilization of the Walkout (Krutka et al., 2017). Various Oklahoma-focused Facebook pages emerged in light of similar strategies used in West Virginia. Social media offered stakeholders a space to share thoughts, ideas, and concerns with others from across the state and the nation I will speak to social media in this section, its impact on other social movements, and how virtual mobilization played a key role in the Walkout.

Rutledge (2010) states that social media has redefined activism by "changing public awareness, word of mouth persuasion, sense of urgency, and individual agency" (para. 1). Oklahoma's two predominant Facebook groups – along with ancillary ones – mirrored the Orange County Education Association Facebook page created by West Virginia teacher, Kyle Wormuth, prior to the West Virginia walkout (Walker, n.d.). Stakeholders appreciated the rapid communication and the non-union ties (Fay, 2018, April 3; McHenry-Sorber, 2018, April 3; Walker, n.d.). Social media also offered a platform for discussion and a sense of solidarity by allowing organizing to emerge through a "digital muscle" (Fay, 2018, April 3; Walker, n.d., para. 4). By flexing this muscle, participants experience emotional buy-in and increased engagement because there is the belief that "individual actions matter" (Rutledge, 2010, para. 5).

However, as evidenced by the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement, and an issue that came up in the Walkout, social media can actually impede a movement when there is not a unifying message or when organizing steps are skipped (Tsukayama, 2017, May 31). Kidd and McIntosh (2016) argue that social media "is both difficult and possible" to enact change within a movement (p. 785) and balance in the movement must occur online and in "occupied space" (Castells as cited in Kidd & McIntosh, 2016, p. 786).

Oklahoma's grassroots social media action was viral. Alberto Morejon, a teacher for Stillwater Public Schools started a Facebook group on February 27, 2018, *Oklahoma Teacher Walkout – The Time is Now!*. The Facebook groups' initial aim questioned the OEA's combined decision with the Oklahoma Education Coalition to begin the walkout at the end of April or early May. Within a few days, Morejon's group totaled to more than 70,000 members (Morejon, n.d.). Simultaneously, the Facebook group, *Oklahoma*

Teachers United with more than 14,000 members and led by Tulsa Public School teacher, Larry Cagle, also began using social media to question OEA's decision (Cagle, n.d.).

The OEA Facebook communication was another important player in the Walkout events. On March 8, 2018, OEA President, Alicia Priest, held a press conference at the OEA headquarters that she streamed live on the OEA Facebook page. Priest publicly placed legislators on notice. Priest made it clear the Walkout goal was not to shut down schools but rather properly fund education. The state should not view public education and its teachers as Oklahoma's burden: educators wanted and demanded action from its legislators. Moreover, Priest stated that if revenues were not generated to meet the year one requirements of the OEA *Together We're Stronger* initiative, teachers would walk from their classrooms on Monday, April 2, 2018 (Felder, 2018, March). The requirements were a teacher and support employee pay increase, additional classroom funding, and a cost-of-living allowance (COLA) for retired teachers (Felder, 2018, March).

Oklahoma educators were ready to act but the growing presence of social media surrounding the Walkout obscured who or which organization was leading the charge. According to Blanc (2019), those involved with the Oklahoma Facebook groups lacked the "political relationships and infrastructures" to mobilize an in-person campaign (p. 116). Neither Facebook leader, Morejon or Cagle, were members of OEA, the state's main union, or any other teacher's union (Blanc, 2019). These disconnects among advocates inside and outside of OEA resulted in miscommunications and misinformation leading up to, during, and after the Walkout. The social media activists had a limited or no base with the OEA, which in turn made it difficult for cohesive messaging and

focused networking challenges to move the Walkout forward. The disconnect from OEA also fed the participants' growing concerns regarding OEA's power and relevancy leading up, during, and after the walkout (Blanc, 2019; Blanc & McAlevey, 2018).

The Oklahoma Facebook groups built on earlier endeavors in West Virginia and later inspired social media groups in Arizona, Kentucky, and Colorado. Stakeholders used these spaces to voice frustrations, hopes, and concerns to a myriad of like-minded participants. The digital grassroots mobilization spurred the OEA to move up the Walkout date and to move the social action from the virtual to the physical grounds of the Oklahoma State Capitol.

Influence of Teachers' Work Actions in Other States on Oklahoma

Work actions taken by educators in other states influenced the events in Oklahoma. From March 2018 to May 2018, the following states had teacher actions and work stoppages: West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Arizona, Colorado, and North Carolina. Teachers realized their plight was tied not only to their students but also to their communities. Also, as the link among energy companies, public funding, and politicians became blatantly apparent, teachers decided to take collective action either through one-day or multiple-day walkouts (Aronoff, 2018, April; Gott & Seidman, 2018, May, p. 4). Educators also utilized the grassroots social media movement, #RedforEd, as a means to share their issues and concerns to stakeholders and others beyond their state. Using this hashtag spurred cohesiveness among the work actions. Since the majority of the states that took action are Republican-led, right-to-work states, the red is symbolic to conservative politics and to the states' budgets placing education fiscally in the red (Blanc, 2020; Nittle, 2018). Wearing a common color also symbolizes unity.

States that experienced these collective actions faced severe teacher shortages due to low pay and lacking working conditions. Across the nation in the fall of 2017, 100,000 people with no or limited education experience filled teaching positions (Blanc, 2019, p. 20). Also, research notes that 40-50% new teachers to the profession quit within five years (Blanc, 2019, p. 20). Even one narrator in this study, a seasoned educator, decided to leave Oklahoma and take a job in another state for higher pay.

Despite years of union busting in these states, stakeholders supported teachers taking action because of the budgetary crisis created by massive tax giveaways (Aronoff, 2018, April; McAlevey, 2018, May). BP-Weeks et al. (2018, April) also attribute the support to the broad and inclusive demands of focusing on increased funding for resources and improved classroom quality that serves students' needs. Increasing teachers' wages helps to increase classroom quality by recruiting and retaining qualified education professionals and therefore unites stakeholders. These comprehensive demands kept teachers in a positive public light and positioned the focus on corporate welfare recipients. As stated by West Virginia teacher, Emily Comer, the teachers' movements were about "rebalancing the power of workers and corporations in our state" (McAlevey, May, 2018, para. 1).

Oklahoma

On March 28, 2018, the Oklahoma legislators passed the first teacher pay raise in over 10 years by increasing the state minimum salary schedule an average of $6,100 (McHenry-Sorber, 2018, April). Governor Fallin signed the bill into law hoping it would deter the April 2nd teacher walkout and stated, "I hope [the teachers] can come up here and say 'thank you' on Monday and go back to the classroom" (Panne, 2018, April, para.

6). However, without transparency regarding the source of the pay raises, pay increases for support personnel, COLA increase for retirees, or classroom funding, educators were not ready to congratulate the legislators on a job not done well and done too late. Instead, OEA pivoted from the pay raise demands and focused on the fight of education funding. However, for those who participated, the Walkout was much more than an economic issue. As one narrator in the current study stated:

> Over the past ten years, we've tried everything possible to change the direction of our legislature in cutting back and cutting back and cutting back more and more and more...this was our last option and it was a radical option, but it was one that the students and the children of Oklahoma entirely deserved. Otherwise we would be a party to their neglect.

For decades, states have systematically defunded public services through privatization and reorganization of worker-employee relations resulting in deep distortions of economic and political priorities (Vachon et al., 2016). For many states and cities, public education takes the brunt of this mindset. For example, the 2012 Chicago Teachers Strike emphasized not only the deliberate assault on public education through neoliberal tactics but also showcased the depths of deprofessionalization that teachers experienced (Nuñez et al., 2017). Nuñez et al. (2017) states "I was feeling demoralized, disillusioned, and dangerously close to despair in 2012" (p. 2) until the Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU) voted to strike that summer. The 2012 Chicago Teachers Strike was not just about teachers, according to Karen Lewis, CTU President; it was about "connecting to the wider struggle for the basic fairness of worker" (Nuñez et al., 2017, p. 2).

Feelings like those voiced by Nuñez' et al (2015) echoed across the nation. As states continued to allow tax cuts for corporations and the wealthiest citizens and to force education funding cuts, people began to take notice (Gott & Seidman, 2018). They also began to take action.

What We Know from the Literature

In this section, I review previous research that grounds this study within the previously discussed socio-political context of the Walkout.

The 2018 wave of teacher strikes raised national awareness about education issues and concerns. Eric Blanc, a former high school teacher, education activist, and writer for the *Jacobin* magazine, authored the book, *Red State Revolt*, after the historic 2018 teacher strike wave that occurred in numerous states considered to be conservative (Blanc, 2019). In his book, Blanc focuses primarily on West Virginia, Oklahoma, and Arizona; three states that have voted Republican in every presidential election since 2000. Hale (2019) notes the significance of those states by acknowledging that the states are "defined by right-to-work legislation, budget-cutting austerity measures taken by conservative legislatures, and a privatization movement marked by charter school expansion" (p. 852). Recent scholarship of teacher strikes (Blanc, D'Amico Pawlewicz, Goldstein, Nuñez et al., Weiner & Asselin) highlights how neoliberalism is embedded into much of the contemporary socio-political climate in the United States and frames teacher movements. These movements act as a push against the neoliberal reform and practices that shape the financial austerity legislators maintain for education. Blanc (2019) underscores in his book that many participants in the walkouts questioned "whether the tremendous

resources of the richest country on earth should be used for meeting human needs or for deepening corporate profits" (p. 10).

Research states there was an increase of strikes in the 60s and 70s due to the rivalry between the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) surrounding collective bargaining (Levine, 1970; Neirynck, 1968; Scribner, 2015, August). In the 1960s, many local associations had gained the right to collectively bargain a negotiated agreement but that right came with a no-strike clause (Scribner, 2015, August). According to Scribner (2015, August), before the 1970s, the NEA attempted to preserve its professional reputation by "avoiding trade-union tactics and decertifying local associations that broke its no-strike pledge" (p. 542). Instead, the NEA opted to impose sanctions and "pressure campaigns" in the hopes that districts and the state would yield in order to avoid negative publicity (Scribner, 2015, August, p. 543). This tactic faltered by the end of the 1960s and NEA shifted its position on strikes (Scribner, 2015, August). Levine's (1970) work drew from the 1965 and 1968 NEA teacher opinion polls asking those who felt justified to strike their top reasons for striking. Based on the results, the top three reasons in 1968 were 1) remedy unsafe conditions for students, 2) achieve satisfactory teaching conditions, and 3) obtain higher salaries (Levine, 1970, p. 4). In 1965, obtaining a negotiated agreement ranked higher than achieving satisfactory teaching conditions (Levine, 1970, p. 4).

Studies also indicate teachers often use the *threat* of a strike due to the *hesitancy to actually declare* a strike (Levine, 1970; Neirynck, 1968; Robert & Tyssens, 2008). This hesitancy is based on the thought that a strike may not elicit needed public support to be successful (Neirynck, 1968, p. 302). The perceived lack of public support is based

on the negative connotation of the word "strike" that is often "deemed unprofessional" (Levine, 1970, p. 5) or a 'radical' labor action at odds with some teachers' reasons for walking out. Neirynck (1968) also said, "In order for the teachers to be united, their cause must be clear and convincing to the overwhelming majority of them. Even if it is clear and convincing, the teacher must be ready to assume the risks inherent in a strike" (p. 302). Those risks center on teachers being considered governmental employees and essentially not holding the right to strike.

Schirmer's (2017) research on the 1974 Hortonville, Wisconsin strike highlights some of those risks' educators may take. Drawing from oral histories of teachers, union activists, and community members that were collected in 1974 after the strike, Schirmer (2016) revisits the pivotal event that resulted in all 88 teachers being fired (p. 9) due to striking against the school board that refused to negotiate. In this case study analysis, Schirmer (2016) raises the question, "what form of voice and action are legitimately available to teachers or more bluntly, whether or not teachers should strike" (p. 23). This study also addresses the union securing external provisions to obtain rights through "interest arbitration as a bargaining impasse technique" (Schirmer, 2017, p. 23) which Schirmer argues weakened the union by limiting its ability to strike and its ability to develop educator solidarity (p. 23). Instead, Schirmer (2017) views this historical strike as the union "bending to the contours of neoliberal pressures" instead of working to "reconfigure their power in ways that value the affective components of teachers' work" (p. 24). Schirmer (2017) contends that one way the union can wield power is through a strike. However, by striking, educators are participating in legally prohibited activities

(Levine, 1970) which for some educators creates philosophical conflict (Robert & Tyssens, 2008).

Research by Robert and Tyssens (2008) addresses the philosophical rub as the "service ideology" (p. 501) that is a common aspect of teacher identity. They conducted a multi-level analysis of teacher strikes from various countries. The majority of educators when discussing their reasons for participating in a strike referred to the "interest of students, of their parents, or even the general interest" before discussing their own interests (Robert & Tyssens, 2008, p. 512) which mirrors the 1968 NEA teachers opinion poll. This teacher language also surfaces in my current study. Unlike Neirynck's (1968) claim that a strike would not have public support, this service ideology message seems to maintain and even build parental trust when teachers strike because the teachers are standing in "solidarity with the rest of society" (p. 514) by protecting the interests of students. In addition, their study also revealed a continued hesitancy to use the word "strike" among educators due to the stigma associated with the action (p. 512) and the perception that by striking against the school board or the legislature is comparable to "rebelling against oneself" (p. 504). As a result, multiple-day strikes are not as common as the one-day or two-day work actions that are most common among educators worldwide since 1945 (Levine, 1970; Robert & Tyssens, 2008, p. 508).

Despite the hesitancy for some teachers to engage in job actions, research indicates the majority of teachers' strikes in previous years were actions taken against a school board due to a breakdown during the collective bargaining process (Levine, 1970; Robert & Tyssens, 2008; Schirmer, 2017; Scribner, 2015, August). However, in recent years, teachers have taken action as means to "pushing back against neoliberal education

reform" (Brickner, 2016, p.16) and have moved toward social justice unionism that builds from rank-and-file union members and creates like-minded community member relationships.

Research also indicates that many of the recent educator actions have surfaced outside of the union's status quo parameters which is often a top-down approach (Blanc, 2019; Brickner, 2016; Brogan, 2014; Gutierrez, 2013; Hale, 2019; Maton, 2016; Nuñez et al., 2017; Rodriguez, 2015). This claim is evidenced in the 2012 Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) strike –the first for CTU in 25 years (Brogan, 2014; Gutierrez, 2013; Nuñez et al., 2017; Rodriguez, 2015). As laws restricted the CTU's ability to effectively bargain (Brogan, 2014), rank-and-file union members perceived union leaders as complacent to the neoliberal reforms. This perceived complacency can be attributed to an increase of political attacks against unions. To fight these increased political assaults, unions moved away from *working against* and instead, focused on *working with* legislatures, school boards, and administration (Weiner & Asselin, 2020, p. 246). This collaborative model of unionism caused concern among CTU membership and generated a social justice caucus, Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE), to organize in 2008 for change within the CTU and against ongoing neoliberal school reforms prevalent across the nation (Brogan, 2014, p. 149; Weiner & Asselin, 2020). CORE built relationships with other grassroots groups to build a relational community focused on social justice unionism (Brogan, 2014, p. 151; Weiner & Asselin, 2020). CORE gained leadership roles within CTU in 2010 and sought to tie workplace issues to the "broader struggles encountered by the community" (Brogan, 2014, p. 151) while also building workplace power through its rank-and-file

members. The support of the Oklahoma public was crucial for teachers' participation in the 2018 Walkout.

In 2012, CTU led a seven-day strike demanding "smaller classes, much-needed student services, and a stability for a profession that's battling a corporate takeover" (Moran, 2012, September). Brogan (2014) contends that this dual prioritizing of community and workplace organizing led to the 2012 CTU strike's success because local connections were made to struggles of the neoliberal agenda that "puts profits ahead of people" (p. 152). In addition, the 2012 CTU strike increased the union's rank-and-file engagement and built public support and participation by taking creative action that strengthened "collective capacities that are vital to ongoing struggle" (Brogan, 2014, p. 160). The success of the strike also served as a model for union restructure. CORE added a social justice layer to the traditional approaches embedded within CTU (Weiner & Asselin, 2020). This social justice layer showcased the power of teacher voice within a mobilized union (Weiner & Asselin, 2020, pp. 247-248). Research shows that comparable social justice caucuses emerged in Philadelphia and Los Angeles (Maton, 2016).

Numerous researchers have focused on the CTU Chicago strike. Rodriguez (2015), for example, conducted an ethnographic study on the 2012 CTU strike by interviewing teachers who "protested, organized, and agitated against local educational policies" (p. 74). The study focused on teachers' resistance to contemporary neoliberal-infused policies and reforms through their activism. Framing her findings as acts of "teacher resistance" (p. 78), Rodriguez (2015) found three themes: 1) small acts of resistance in a variety of forms connected to self-awareness and critical consciousness

development (p. 78-79), 2) teacher-student relationships as central to education and to activism (p. 81), and 3) teachers' investment in the purpose of public schools in a democracy (Rodriguez, 2015, p. 83). The study determined that educators needed space for "their voices to be heard" in relation to the "politics and educational-emotional dimensions of teaching" and that researchers and advocates should observe and document the voices and experiences of teachers within local contexts to provide foundational knowledge (p. 86). Rodriguez (2015) also suggested the necessity of organizing educators to build and maintain resistance to the neoliberal agenda (p.86). My study echoes the ongoing importance of teacher voice in collective action on behalf of education (Nuñez et.al, 2015).

Based on their experiences with the 2012 CTU strike, teacher educators, Nuñez, Michie, and Konkol, wrote a book, *Worth Striking For*, about education policy to "spark interest" (Nuñez et al., 2015, p. 120) in pre-service and in-service teachers. Considered a policy primer, the authors used the 2012 CTU to frame the impact education policy has on students and teachers lives. Nuñez et al. (2015) connects education policy to the impact on classrooms offering concrete examples of how the educator's day-to-day is shaped by political forces. The text concludes with a call for teacher voice by stating "teachers need to start speaking up about education policy...talking to one another about how the 'reforms'...have affected our lives" (Nuñez et al., 2015, p. 119).

The 2012 CTU strike laid the foundation for other states to take notice and organize around social justice issues magnified by neoliberal reform. Maton (2016) researched Philadelphia educators who created their own social justice caucus called the Caucus of Working Educators (WE or the Caucus) (p. 5). By engaging in social

movement unionism, the union was able to build "power of the working class...rather than simply card-carrying union members" (Maton, 2016, p. 7). The study noted that social justice unionism offers change opportunities at the local level and that as educators make local connections to change, these kinds of change possibilities broaden to the city, state, national, and systemic levels (Maton, 2016, p. 16). The study also revealed teachers' desires to have a space and place to express "new ideas, talking and sharing insights with others, and striving for clarity" (Maton, 2016, p. 16). Again, the need and desire for teachers to have voice as actors and advocates within broader systems of power and reform is visible in the literature.

The wave of concentrated teacher activism in this decade came to a swell in 2018 with the "red state revolt" (Blanc, 2019). Most research on teacher strikes and on teacher activism centers on larger, industrialized areas that have a strong labor history (Scribner, 2015, August) and have strong support of social justice issues. Blanc (2019) addresses the unique characteristics of the 2018 strikes that occurred in West Virginia, Oklahoma, and Arizona. Much like the cities, Chicago and Philadelphia, the 2018 "walkouts clearly showed the potential for the revitalization of trade unions, even in the face of 'right to work' laws and legal bans on strikes" (Blanc, 2019, p. 6). In addition, Blanc (2019) addresses the lack of teacher walkouts in predominantly red states as a statement to "institutional roadblocks" that make the risks of participating in "illegal public sector walkouts" too high for workers" (pp. 36-37). However, Blanc (2019) acknowledges that "these strikes were marked by an extraordinary high level of self-activity outside formal organizational structures" (p.103). This activity speaks to the grassroots work carried out through social media (and other networks) to give space and place for educators to voice

their issues and concerns about education in their states (Krutka et al., 2017). However, once the virtual organizing was met with physical assembly, "the limitations of an infrastructure based purely on Facebook became more glaring" (Blanc, 2019, p. 159).

Although Blanc's work is not a conventional study rooted in social science research, Blanc's (2019) interviews and overview of the "Red State revolts" does offer an array of insights into the rise of teacher activism in typically conservative states that have strike prohibitions. It also offers context and forces that led to the strikes, framing the renewed energy for teacher actions as a working-class effort. As Blanc, Nunez et al, and Rodriguez, among others, emphasize, some educators are taking notice of neoliberal reform and the impacts it has on their day-to-day lives. It is also apparent from the text that educators are willing now more than ever to embrace their defiance (Blanc, 2019, p. 2) --despite the potential repercussions---and let their voices be heard.

We know from the scholarship that earlier teacher strikes centered on collective bargaining with action focused on the district's school board. Often, educators would participate in forms of resistance that could potentially lead to a work stoppage. However, educators only halt their labor when they believe there is no other alternative and even then, the time out of the classroom is relatively short. As neoliberal reform in education began to take its hold, strikes became centered on social justice issues, as evidenced in the 2012 CTU strikes (Weiner & Asselin, 2020). This form of teacher activism proved foundational to other educators across the nation to share their collective teacher voice. It is important to note that there is limited sustained scholarship on the most recent teacher's strikes and also on regional teacher's strikes or teacher activism in Oklahoma (Lynn, 2018 is an exception to the latter).

The sparsity of scholarship is underscored by Weiner and Asselin's (2020) critical meta-analysis of available literature focused on teachers work and teachers' unions. Their study pulled available scholarship from 2000-2019 that targeted "critical research about teachers' work; the impact of neoliberal education reforms on teaching and schools; and the impacts of gender and racial inequality in education" (Weiner & Asselin, 2020, pp. 235-236). Based on their analysis, they argue that "teaching conditions are seldom analyzed in relationship to teachers' unions" (Weiner & Asselin, 2020, p. 238). This useful meta-analysis also suggests this lack of connection to working conditions and unions might reflect state's laws that restrict collective bargaining (Weiner & Asselin, 2020). Also, beginning in 2005, "negative political pressure directed at teachers' unions" increased within the literature but with limited research on the contribution teachers' unions could have on changes to those working conditions (Weiner & Asselin, 2020, p. 241). From this scholarship, the authors call for scholars to "re-examine the complexity of teachers' work in relation to neoliberal education reform" and the potential of unions to play a role in shaping educational policy (Weiner & Asselin, 2020, p. 252). In particular, they suggest that educational researchers should take the lead in these research efforts. The current study, while working to preserve and explore narrators' accounts of the Walkout, also adds additional research in a limited area.

Conclusion

The April 2018 Oklahoma Teacher Walkout lasted 9 days beginning on Monday, April 2 and officially ending on Thursday, April 12. Supporters gathered en masse inside the Capitol and on its grounds while others offered support at home by holding signs on street corners, organizing childcare, and handing out food -- along with countless other

activities. At the height of the Walkout, roughly 70% of the state's student population was out of school (Blanc, 2019, p. 157) and Capitol crowds estimated at a daily average of 30,000 in attendance with 50,000 being the largest crowd on the second Monday, April 9, 2018.

This study contributes to the scholarship on teacher activism by exploring the Walkout through the voices of educators and stakeholders who participated. Their oral accounts reflect the value of the Walkout as a vehicle to intensely amplify a collective teacher voice that allowed a degree of individual catharsis as well as emotional connection. Their accounts also reflect the fluid, shifting, conceptions of community that both reflected and were further forged through the interactions and events. It also contributes to the sparse scholarship regarding teacher walkouts historically and regionally by offering the unique stories of those who participated. This study adds to scholarship by 1) preserving the participants' individual and collective accounts of the Oklahoma Walkout; 2) providing insights into teacher walkouts in conservative, right-to-work states; and, 3) marking the importance of teacher voice and activism in relation to the conditions shaping teachers' work lives that emerge from neoliberal reforms and decades of state conditions of austerity in Oklahoma. The witty placards, the use of social media, and the sheer numbers of participants were vital forms of voice on behalf of education at this historical moment.

Although the Walkout manifested very quickly in April 2018 as part of the "red-state revolt" (Blanc, 2019), it's important to emphasize the action was decades in the making. The last major Oklahoma walkout took place in 1990 and followed by voters passing SQ640 in 1992 that required the supermajority to increase taxes. This created the

political stage to impede new funding for Oklahoma's education system. Yet teachers continued to shoulder Oklahoma's educational needs while legislators prioritized other funding initiatives. After 30 years of legislative neglect and uncertainty of the extent of public support, teachers hit a boiling point. With the OEA/NEA logistical support, they gained collective confidence in the wake of West Virginia's collective action to join "ongoing...social and political movement...whose action and inaction demand a different future" (Butler, 2015, pp. 74-75).

In a limited timeframe, with OEA's help and financial backing by NEA, stakeholders from across the state mobilized. Teachers' absence from classrooms, with many districts pausing instruction, testifies to the importance of their embodied *presence*. Gathering both reflected and fueled stakeholders' connections to the prevailing hope that legislators would see and hear their serious education concerns. For the narrators in this study, though the salary increase was appreciated, it was not the only concern that motivated their participation. It was about years of feeling as if their profession did not matter and that the needs of the classroom and its children could perpetually be left on the legislative backburner. As one participant stated, "I am doing this for my kids. I am doing this for my classroom. I am doing this for my school … it was not for selfish motives and reasons."

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the research methodology for this oral history study focused on the April 2018 Oklahoma Teacher Walkout. By focusing on eliciting and preserving individual Walkout accounts, this oral history positioned in interpretivism provided a vehicle to offer a broader portrait of historical phenomenon and events. As the study unfolded, inductive analysis and several concepts and theories, including embodied theorizing (e.g. Ellingson, 2017; Snowber, 2016) and "mattering" (Flett, 2018) facilitated analysis of participants' understanding of events. As a researcher, I subscribed to Childers' (2014) appreciation for "promiscuous data analysis" (p. 820) and Ellingson's (2017) embracing of a stance of being a theoretical fence sitter who "promiscuously" dabbles in an array of analytic approaches appropriate for the inquiry (p. 3). Participants' stories offered a sense of history unfolding, marked the climate in Oklahoma's education system at the time of the Walkout, and provided participants the opportunity for transformative reflection. In this chapter, I discuss the unfolding of the methods and methodology along with the research plan, including the study participants, procedures, analysis methods, and attention to quality and ethics.

Epistemology and Theoretical Perspective

I chose to conduct an oral history study based on the study's purpose and my initial inquiry regarding the Walkout. Inductive analysis allowed common themes to emerge that centered around embodiment (Ellingson, 2017), collective action through assembly (Butler, 2015), and mattering/antimattering (Flett, 2018). Qualitative research is conducted within a variety of theoretical perspectives such as phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, critical theory, among others. These perspectives stem from disciplinary roots such as anthropology, literary arts, linguistics, philosophy, social sciences, sociology, and psychology (Gall et al., 1996; Patton, 2015). According to Gall et al. (1996) the foundational purpose of qualitative research is "to discover the nature of meanings associated with social phenomena" (p. 343). As Patton (2015) emphasizes, qualitative research can illuminate meaning when the inquiry "studies, documents, analyzes, and interprets how human beings construct and attach meanings to their experiences" (p. 13).

The process, as Patton states, is a personal one (p. 3). As a researcher and a life-long educator, I experienced this process as personal as I sought to make meaning of the Walkout and its significance to the contemporary context of education in Oklahoma and to education activism. As an OEA staff member, I worked with locals and administrators leading up to the Walkout and also worked the logistics during the Walkout. As a participant and observer in the mass action, I identify with teachers and believe teachers' voices matter. My intent was to elicit and preserve the stories of Walkout participants and through the unfolding of analysis, allow meaning to emerge to gain a fuller understanding

of the significance of the event and lessons for educational actions in a conservative, right-to-work state.

Crotty's (2013) research framework guided my qualitative study as I grappled with the components of this study's epistemology and theoretical perspective which lends to the design of the methodology and methods. An epistemology, as defined by Crotty (2013), "is a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know" (p. 3). Based on my study, constructionism offers the philosophical stance on which to create my design. Constructionism adheres to the view that meaning emerges and is constructed through interaction with the human consciousness and is not simply discovered (Crotty, 2013, pp.42-43). This stance departs from the objectivist epistemology that claims meaning is housed within the object itself regardless of human interaction (Crotty, 2013, p. 42). As preliminarily thoughts of the Walkout emerged, I began to approach the inquiry and oral history collection process through the lens of constructionism as I worked toward creating meaning for this study. As the researcher and as a Walkout participant, I wanted to "construct meaning" of the event by understanding the individual accounts that narrators shared (Crotty, 2013, p. 44). As participants reflectively shared their Walkout stories, both participants and I constructed meaning as we engaged and interpreted the event. As I further interacted and worked through the untidy process of collection, transcription, and analysis, I was able to further engage, interpret, and construct further understandings and meanings (Crotty, 2013).

With the constructionism epistemology in place, I moved into the space of theoretical perspective which defined by Crotty (2013) is "our view of the human world and social life within that world" (p. 7). As I continued to work through the Walkout and

my initial thoughts around the study, I moved into the realm of interpretivism for my theoretical perspective. Finding roots in Max Weber's thoughts surrounding *Verstehn,* or understanding, interpretivism "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social world (Crotty, 2013, p. 67). In reference to the Walkout, one could understand its meaning from many perspectives; I focus on the viewpoint of those who participated, based on their subjective consciousness of the Walkout experience. Rather than understanding the Walkout as having fixed meanings or as inherently meaningful, I focused on participants' accounts and how participants understand its meaning (Gall et al., 1996). By coupling constructionism and interpretivism, I held to the stance that our meanings are interpreted and understood through our interactions with the social world and therefore, was able to bring this context as my rationale for my oral history research study. My goal was both to preserve and to explore accounts.

Problem Statement

The primary purpose of this study was not to add to existing literature, but to preserve accounts, make meaning of accounts, and consider what the accounts say about teacher activism and teacher voice while also offering glimpse into the historical significance and context of the Walkout. Yet, there is also a significant need for scholarship pertaining to "red state" Walkouts.

The majority of scholarship on strikes, walkouts, and other forms of job actions has been focused in places such as Chicago, Philadelphia, and on school districts where collective bargaining has met a standstill and educators take action against their local school board. There is a lack of scholarship on education activism that focuses on educators from multiple school districts taking sustained collective action against the

state legislature. As a right-to-work state, Oklahoma has limited collective bargaining laws that deter educators from strikes. Also, as a socially and politically conservative state, Oklahoma is resistant to teacher unions and historically attempts to lessen the union's power through legislation. Yet, the unique socio-political contours of Oklahoma make understanding the reasons and value for people participating important to examine.

Inquiry Questions

This oral history contributes to published literature. Accounts of and scholarship on recent education activism are slowly growing (e.g. Blanc, 2019; D'Amico Pawlewicz, forthcoming; Weiner & Asselin, 2020). More are needed; my study explores answers to the following Inquiry Questions:

1. What triggered participants to join in the events of the April 2018 Oklahoma Teachers Walkout?
2. After participating in the Walkout, what do the participants envision for the future for Oklahoma's education system?
3. What varied experiences did participating in the Walkout have for narrators?
4. What do participants' stories reveal about the context and significance of this teacher collective action in a right-to-work state?

Methodology

The oral history study, which began in May 2018, focused on eliciting and preserving individual accounts of the Walkout using oral history and visual inquiry methods. However, the process to that point was messy at best (Lather & Smithies, 1997). The events leading up to the Walkout essentially erupted and dismantled my completed research proposal prior to its implementation. The magnitude of the Walkout

forced me to change directions and reconstruct my proposal. This resulted in my path taking a weaving and wandering approach (Ellingson, 2017, pp. 4-5). My original goal was to preserve the oral histories, rather than build on existing literature. Yet, the pressing "problem" and the study purpose unfolded and crystallized as I carried it out.

I opted to design an oral history study because as a researcher, educator, and contributor to both organizing and participating in the Walkout, I value the stories of individual experiences and the preservation of a permanent record of the participants' understanding of the Walkout. I also value the opportunity for others to gain a deeper understanding of the structure and meaning of the Walkout as they engage with those stories. The process also provides a direct channel to centering the voices of Oklahoma teachers as agents of change. All participants identified themselves as either a current or former educator, as their stories unfolded, wove that identity in their accounts. On a personal level, the study provided an opportunity to stakeholders who participated in Walkout to process their individual experiences through reflectively recounting them to an empathetic and fellow participant.

Oral history is a methodology offering the significance of past events to emerge from and through the stories of the events' participants (Henige, 1988, p. 3). By gathering participants' first-hand stories of the Walkout, readers and listeners gain new knowledge and insights about the contextual significance of the Walkout and its meaning for individuals, educators, and Oklahoma education (Shopes, 2011, as cited in Patton, 2015, p. 435). In turn, this new knowledge contributes to scholarship that focuses on regional education activism along with broader education activism scholarship. By preserving the individual accounts and essentially "analyzing their memories" (Abrams,

2010, as cited in Patton, 2015, p. 435), a sense of the history unfolds from the collection of stories.

According to Thompson (2000) oral history brings "recognition to substantial groups of people who had been ignored" (p. 8). Too often teachers and other education supporters lack opportunities to share their stories regarding their issues and concerns surrounding education (Nuñez, et al, 2015). I selected oral history interviewing for this study because I wanted to offer space for the participants' personal perspectives of the historical event in Oklahoma's socio-political history. By examining the lived experiences of educators, broader understanding emerges across and through the accounts According to Berger et al. (2005), the understanding comes through the telling, the remembering, the reworking, the reimaging, and the reflecting on the past as the story unfolds (as cited in Batty, 2009, p. 111). Oral history often includes substantial narratives as part of preserving participants' accounts. Chapter VII and VIII, my account, are two such representations of preserving extended stories. In addition, I weave other substantial individual accounts and themes across the accounts throughout the study. In this section, I provide a description of oral history as a research methodology. As April said, sharing her story offered her a chance to reflect and she simply ended our time together by saying, "Thank you for letting me remember."

Oral History

According to the Oral History Association (OHA), oral history is defined as a "field of study and a method of gathering, preserving, and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events" and, as a cultural and community practice, predates the written word (https://www.oralhistory.org/about/do-

oral-history/). Contemporary oral history emerged in the 1940s, post-World War II, with the invention of the portable tape recorder which allowed researchers to readily preserve and archive oral history interviews as primary sources that others could then access (Perks & Thomson, 2016, p. 2). Batty (2009) contends that oral history became more popular in the 1960s and 1970s when portable recording equipment reduced in cost and researchers were able to "document such rising social movements at civil rights, feminism, and anti-Vietnam War protests" (p. 110).

Paul Thompson (2016), a sociology professor and founder-editor of the *Oral History* journal, claims that oral history "can be a means for transforming both the content and the purpose of history" (p. 34). Thompson (2016) suggests the action can be transformative for the participant in allowing for introducing new information by shifting focus and inquiry from the researcher onto participants and offering recognition to groups who have traditionally been under-represented (p. 38). Oral history allows the researcher to collect and, also, *preserve* the participants' own stories directly rather than having an outside researcher write up those stories (Batty, 2009, p. 110). I worked to collect and preserve as well as weave and analyze the accounts. By collecting the individual accounts of a historical experience, understanding emerges from within the cultural and structural settings of that event (Batty, 2009). Moreover, this process allows for rich understanding of historical events by examining how individuals interpret those experiences (Batty, 2009).

Oral history researchers (e.g., Bryman, 2004; Portelli, 1991; Thompson, 2000) contend that the stories people share allow for a deeper understanding of the lived experience. Thompson (2016) further states that "oral history is a history built around

people. It thrusts life into history itself and it widens its scope. … It provides a means for radical transformation of the social meaning of history" (p. 39). Portelli (2016), a leading practitioner of oral history, adds "oral sources give information about … social groups whose written history is either missing or distorted" (p. 50), such as in the case of this study, teachers. By engaging in oral history, people can begin to understand historical events and its effects on individual lives. This understanding can lead to "radical implications for the social message of history as a whole" (Thompson, 2016, p. 36). Thompson (2016) continues by stating "the scope of historical writing itself is enlarged and enriched…History becomes...more democratic" (p. 37).

Oral history requires the researcher to use a qualitative interview process. Implementing an in-depth interview process coupled with the flexibility of follow-up questions gives participants the opportunity to reflectively explore their responses (Batty, 2009, p. 112). According to Thompson (2016), a key element to effective oral history interviewing is the researcher's ability to "understand human relationships" (p. 38). Essentially, the story told is the direct result of interaction between the participant and the researcher (Anderson et al., 1987, p. 114). Portelli (2016) contends that the "content of oral sources...depends largely on what the interviewer puts into it in terms of questions, dialogue, and personal relationship" (p. 55). By designing open-ended questions, building rapport with diverse narrators, and actively listening throughout the course of the interview, the narrator and the researcher are able to achieve collective meaning of the historical event under study (Batty, 2009, p.112).

As Batty (2009) notes, some critiques surrounding oral history focus on the researcher subjectivity and the participants' memory reliability. Other researchers (e.g.

Perks & Thomson, 2016; Sheftel & Zembrzycki, 2013) have noted this as a flaw as well. In the 70s some early researchers (e.g. Michael Frisch) argued that memory impacted one's perspective on oral history and that it could not be viewed as "history as it really was" (Perks & Thomson, 2016, p. 4). This notion coupled memory as not only a 'source' of oral history but also a 'subject' of oral history (Perks & Thomson, 2016, p. 4). Portelli (2016) emphasized that "oral sources are credible but with a different credibility" (p. 53). In this view, it may not give the facts of the historical event but should be valued, nonetheless, for its active creation of meanings from the individual accounts of participants who are immersed in the event (Portelli, 2016, p. 54).

My epistemology of constructionism is aligned with this understanding as articulated by Portelli. It supports the idea of participant "truth" and perception holding meaning through participant's constructed reality or memory rather than a mirror or exact replica of historical events. Similarly, long standing critiques of researcher subjectivity echoes positivists' belief that researchers should be objective and stand outside of the phenomena being studied. Yet, this position is directly at odds with my study due to my participation in the Walkout and support of teacher activism. Oral history researchers acknowledge that the qualitative interview process enmeshes the researcher and the participant as both grapple with meaning making (Perks & Thomson, 2016; Sheftel & Zembrzycki, 2013). Similarly, in a constructionist study, such as mine, my subjectivity is not a weakness to the oral history but rather a unique characteristic that offers me to embrace reflexivity and to research "with" the participants.

Methods

In this section, I discuss the methods I used to elicit and preserve the narrators' individual accounts using oral history methodology. I address how I recruited and selected participants, collected accounts, and analyzed them individually and collectively.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

For this study, I contacted individuals in my personal and professional networks to invite them to participate in interviews about their Walkout experiences. My professional networks include but are not limited to the Oklahoma Education Association (OEA), Enid Public Schools (EPS), Oklahoma State University (OSU), Northwestern Oklahoma State University (NWOSU), and National Education Association (NEA). I focused on collecting stories from those who participated in or supported the Walkout which included teachers, parents, and community members. As I interviewed participants, I used snowball sampling. This common method relies on participants identifying other key informants who might have interest in participating in the study.

Upon approval by my dissertation committee, I submitted required documents to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Oklahoma State University. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) "Common Rule" focuses primarily on biomedical and behavioral research According to White (2017), scholarly history projects "should not be subject to standard IRB procedures since they are designed for the research practices of the sciences" (para. 1). As approved by my IRB for oral history study (See Appendix B), I contacted participants through a variety of methods such as in-person, email, and/or a phone. Upon initial contact, I discussed the purpose of the study and answered any questions the potential participant had. Once I made initial contact per IRB guidelines, if

the participant was agreeable, I used private social media message, or text messages to schedule interviews. I invited participants to meet for an interview regarding their experiences surrounding the Walkout. Participants selected the date and time for the interview and self-selected the location.

Those participating in the study read and signed an informed consent form as required to participate. None of those interviewed withdrew their consent. Of the 22 narrators, 15 agreed for me to contact them within six months of the study's conclusion to discuss offering a deed of gift of their recording, transcripts, and photographs, if provided, to the Oklahoma State University oral history archives.

Narrators

I planned to interview approximately 30-60 Walkout participants for this study to offer a larger sampling from across the state of Oklahoma. My original interest was representing all of the Oklahoma counties. The final number of participants was 22. Through my work in northwest Oklahoma, I had the most access to participants in that area. Yet I also had access to the four-quadrants of the state and the two metro areas, Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

All stakeholders participating in the study served or do serve as educational agents and supporters through their parenting or civic roles, whether as administrators, OEA employees, or in other important roles in the schools or their communities. The participating narrators are situated in rural, suburban, and urban communities and school districts from across the state of Oklahoma, representing 6 of 77 counties (See Appendix C). Individuals are aged 30 through 60 (See Table 1) with 16 females and 6 males.

Table 1 *Age Ranges of Participants*			
30 - 40 years old	41 - 50 years old	51 - 60 years old	61+ years old
4	10	2	6

Four identify as Native American with the others identifying as Caucasian. At the time of the interviews, 16 participants identified as educators currently working in a school system, and seven worked in school districts classified as suburban, three as rural, and six as urban. Two participants identified as retired from the education system and one identified as a current administrator of a rural district. Four participants identified as staff members or governance with OEA. Two participants, though classified as teachers, served in the capacity of president of their local teachers' association with a full-time release and did not have classroom duties (See Table 2). It is worth noting that all participants self-identified first as an educator regardless of their current official role or working situation.

Of the current educator participants, eight work in secondary education, grades six through twelve, and five individuals work in elementary, grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Seven obtained their teaching certification through traditional, teacher educator programs, while six were certified through an alternative route.

Table 2

Current Job Classification

Educator	Administrator	Local Association President	Retired Educator	OEA Staff or Governance
13	1	2	2	4

Notes. Local Association Presidents are classified as educators but are not in the classroom. Retired Educators do not include OEA Staff or Governance.

Of the 22 narrators, 12 are parents with children ranging in ages of three years old to college-aged at the time of the interviews while four identify as grandparents with grandchildren in the public-school system. Of the participants, I have a personal and professional relationship with eight of them. For three of them, the interview was the first time we had met in any capacity. For the remainder, I had varying degrees of a professional relationship. All participants agreed through written and verbal consent to have their own names used for the study. I have chosen to use only first names.

Collection of Oral Histories

Patton (2015) states that part of qualitative research is "capturing stories to understand people's perspectives and expectations" (p. 9). My study's primary purpose was to capture the stories of the Walkout's participants so I could understand fully about their experiences. In addition, this study provides, where possible, glimpses into the Walkout's historical context and broader significance. The individual stories revealed the socio-political context and discourse that led individuals to participate in mass action. As noted above, this led me to use "qualitative inquiry questions" that offered "in-depth, individualized, and contextualized" information from participants (Patton, 2015, p.9).

Interview Process

I decided to follow an open semi-structured interview protocol with some standardized questions along with follow-up questions as needed. I used open-ended questions to invite participants' reflections on events they deemed significant and relevant. This approach allowed me to collect detailed information in a conversational style. I interviewed each participant once using open questions and photo-elicitation (Bignante, 2010; Glaw, 2017). I provided the photos as dialogue prompts and acquired them from online sites and my personal archive. I recorded the interviews electronically using a BOOCOSA Multifunction Voice Recorder ™ void of identification and uploaded to DropBox, my hard drive, and a Google folder for back-ups. Interviews began with explaining the informed consent form. I then asked participants to tell me about their educational background including familial information and professional information. From that point, I began the conversations with open-ended questions about memories of the Walkout, such as "Tell me about the events that led up to the April 2018 Oklahoma Teacher Walkout," "Tell me what it was like for you during the walkout," "Tell me about what it was like after the Walkout." By using open-ended prompts, I invited narrators to provide "thoughtful, in-depth responses...salient" to them (Patton, 2015, p. 428). These prompts provided reflective space for narrators to share stories. I used follow-up questions, if needed.

After the first four open-ended questions, I then introduced my photo elicitation technique to prompt reactions and memories of the event (Bignante, 2010; Glaw et al., 2017; Harper, 2002; Patton, 2015). I self-selected photos that offered a range of visuals from the Walkout such as crowds both inside and outside of the Capitol, groups marching

with banners and signs, crowds holding signs, and individuals and/or small groups interacting with others. During the interview process, I asked participants to look over the photographs. I allowed them to touch, pick up, and move the photos around. I asked the participants to share any memories or thoughts evoked by the photographs which are visual representations of the Walkout. After participants shared, I then asked them to tell me about their hopes for the future of Oklahoma's education system. Prior to ending the interview, I offered participants an opportunity to add any additional information they wanted to share. With one exception, each participants' interview took place in a single interview session. I asked one participant for a follow-up interview in order to ask clarifying questions about her interview. Sixteen interviews took place within six months of the Walkout's conclusion. The remainder took place within the first year of the Walkout and of those, five took place during the timeframe of the one-year anniversary. Interviews ranged in time from 25 minutes to 1 hours 40 minutes.

I transcribed eight of the narrator's interviews by first running the interview through Dragon Dictation Software ™ which provided a messy, rough draft. I then relistened, multiple times, to the interview in order to transcribe from the initial rough draft. I did this due to my poor auditory processing skills which was slowing down my transcription process. I transcribed the remainder, 14, with traditional transcription methods of (re)listening to the audio recording in real time and transcribing the interview into a Microsoft Word document. I, also, relistened to interviews multiple times in order to assist in the processing and analysis of information. I worked with a modified Gee's (1985, 1986, 1991) approach to transcription. Gee studied speech structure and "developed a structural presentation that arranges text in poetic units, such as ideas units,

lines, stanzas, strophs, and parts" (Poindexter, 2002, p. 62). Repeated listenings offered me the opportunity to (re)hear emphasis of words or phrases, pauses, and other speech patterns (Poindexter, 2002). I transcribed using a line and stanza approach to closely follow speech patterns. I also noted pauses, emphases, and hesitations in the transcription by using ellipses. Also, within my transcription, I added my own thoughts and comments to the accounts which lends itself to Mishler's (1986) belief that the interview is produced, shaped, and organized between the participant and the researcher. Following this approach allowed me to better understand how the participant made sense of the lived experience (Poindexter, 2002).

Due to my proximity to the Walkout both personally and professionally, I understood my sense of "being-with" (Ellingson, 2017) the participants as the interviews took place. Despite being out of the classroom for over seven years, I had an empathic understanding of the participants' feelings expressed during the interviews. I also shared with participants the political struggles with legislators along with the actual events of the Walkout. Taking "being-with" into careful consideration, I was mindful of Ellingson's (2017) embodied ethics of researcher conduct that centers on the following: being-with, compassion, dynamic, public and private bodies, and reciprocity (pp. 46-50).

Interview Settings

Participants self-selected the locations of their interviews along with the date and time. I used the following locations: coffee shops, classrooms, a local pub, Skype software, and restaurants. Understanding fully that education professionals and stakeholders are often pressed for free time, I made every effort to travel to the locations. If we were in a setting where we could consume drinks and/or food, I paid. Allowing

participants to self-select the location, date, and time was a small gesture on my part to make them feel at ease with the process. Some selected their own classrooms which may or may not have included students. Some opted to have their own children with them which left space for natural interruptions. All interviews had an element of interruption, whether a colleague popping in to ask a question, a phone call, or a child interacting with the narrator. These interruptions reflect the multi-tasking personae often associated with the education realm of constantly managing a wide variety of tasks. A few interviews took place over coffee in a rather noisy location but despite the background noises, the participants stayed focused and reflective. Often, I would initiate casual conversation prior to recording to set the participant at ease with the process.

Photo Elicitation

I used photo elicitation mid-way through each interview to "stimulate reflections, support memory recall, and elicit stories as part of the interviewing" (Patton, 2015, p. 484). Photo elicitation methods involve the use of photographs during an interview to stimulate and generate memory, reflections, and verbal discussion (Bignante, 2010; Glaw et al., 2017; Harper, 2002; Patton, 2015). Bignante (2010) contends that photo elicitation is best "viewed as an adjunct" to interviewing (p. 15). Glaw et al. (2017) supports this stance by stating that the method can "add value to already existing methods by bringing in another dimension" (p. 2). In Glaw et al.'s (2017) study of autophotography and photo elicitation as applied to mental health research, they contend that "visual methods enhance the richness of data by discovering additional layers of meaning, adding validity and depth, and creating knowledge," capturing more detail than verbal and written methods (p.1).

Applying this layered method to the interviewing approach proved to be a powerful component to the interviewing process in this study. The reflection and the storytelling surrounding the photographs elicited the strongest emotional responses from the participants, therefore deepening their reflections about the Walkout. During the course of the interviews, based on the photo elicitation process, 21 participants cried or displayed marked emotions while conveying their experiences. Also, as participants picked up the photos and moved them around, it gave a space for silence, thought, and reflection prior to speaking. With photo elicitation the visual images are provided by the research or by the participant (Glaw et al., 2017).

(*Figure 2, Photo Prompt: Teamsters, Doug Folks, OEA staff, 2018)*

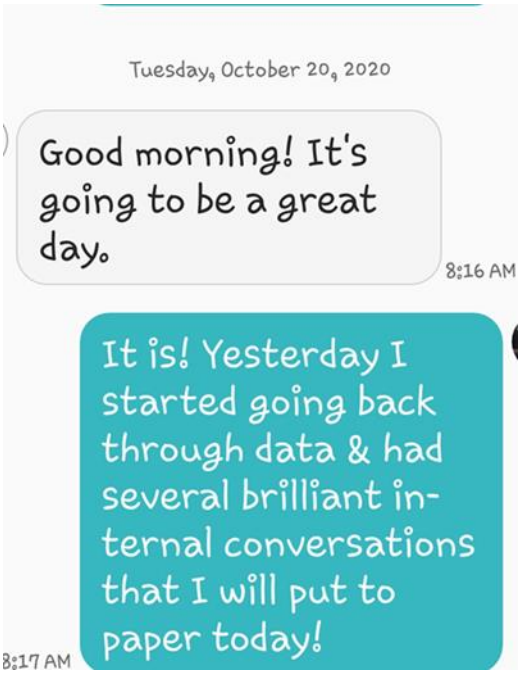
(Figure 3, Photo Prompt: 110-mile Tulsa March, Doug Folks, OEA staff, 2018)

I opted to provide images from the Walkout that were from my personal archives, shared with me from an OEA communications staff member, or found through social media. The researcher selected photos provided a range of fourteen images from the Walkout that depicted the crowds, the signs, the people marching, individuals speaking, and activities happening (such as singing, standing at the overpass). By providing visual reminders of the Walkout, participants seemed to step back into the sights, sounds, and feelings experienced while participating in the Walkout (Bignante, 2010).

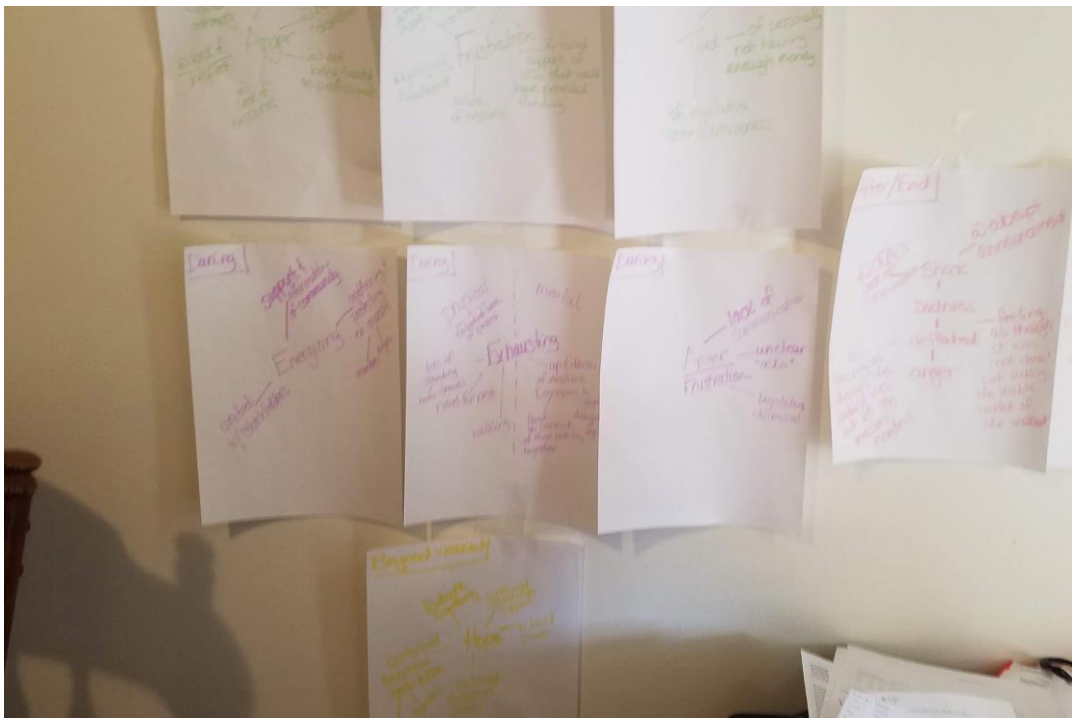
Analysis Approaches

A variety of unique, analytical methods were used to make meaning both within and across narratives (Patton, 2015, p. 47). As Ellingson (2017) states, qualitative scholarship occurs "betwixt and between spaces" that house a single approach (p.3) and I concur with this thought. I used drawing and visual representations along with data displays to visually organize my thoughts and the emerging data. I included emotional analysis of the participants along with my emotional analysis as researcher. As Ellingson

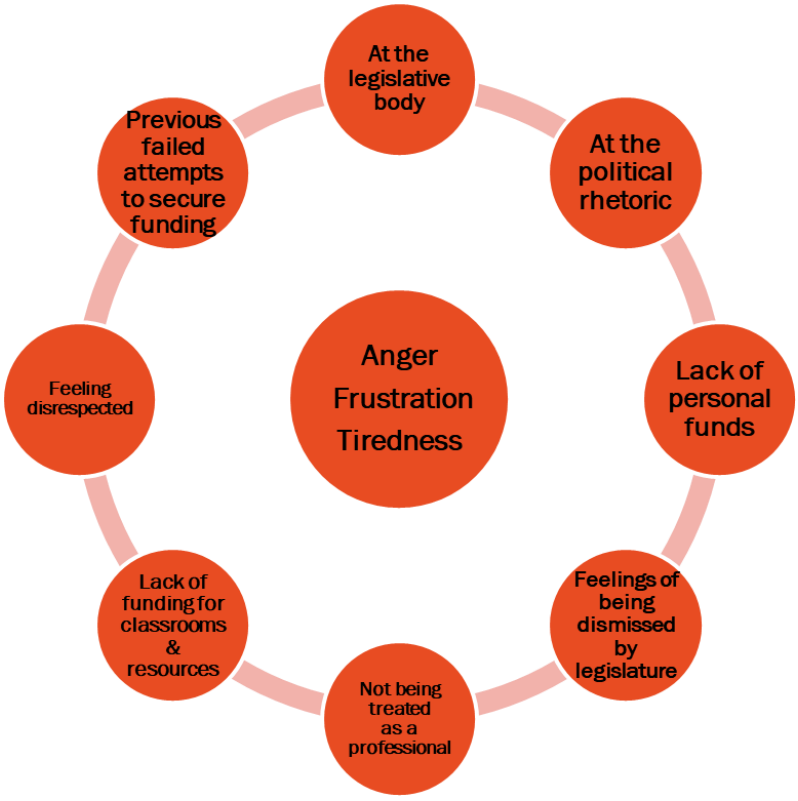
(2015) states “experience is not only always already emotional, but also deeply embodied in its expression” (p. 87). There was weaving of emotions for myself as I experienced and (re)experienced the interviews through the bodily act of interviewing, transcribing, and analyzing. I noted timelines across stories along with attention to pronouns, such as “we,” and “they,” and attention to narrators’ references to sound (Gershon & Appelbaum, 2018) in the Walkout. As I (re)read transcripts and processed the information, a word or phrase would emerge and take hold. From across transcripts, I focused on words and phrases and created data poems. This form of analysis gave me the space to meld my often-fragmented thought process and place it visually onto the paper. As I worked across the individual accounts, the poetry allowed a collective thread to move among the participants’ stories. Also generative was ongoing dialogic exchanges between Dr. Bailey and me. These exchanges occurred during regularly scheduled video-calls, text messages, and the occasional phone call (See Figure 4). We both participated in analysis, had embodied reactions, and engaged in drawing and imaging. Sharing collaborative analysis would often catapult and nuance my own understanding. I represent some of my data displays below (see Figure 5 and 6).



(*Figure 4, Analyze That, Rhonda Harlow, 2020*)



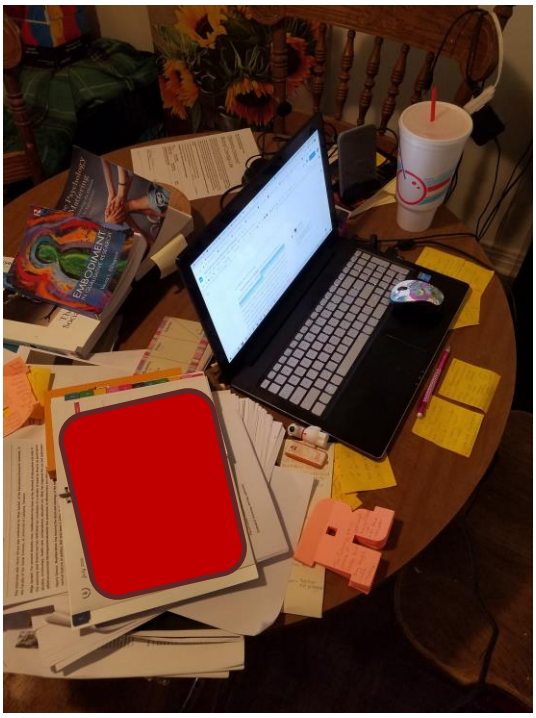
(*Figure 5, Sprawling Thoughts onto a Page, Rhonda Harlow, 2020*)



(*Figure 6, From Paper/Pencil to Digital, Rhonda Harlow, 2020*)

The context of place mattered in analysis as well in terms of where, when, and how the analysis took place shaping the meaning-making process. As an education advocate and former educator, I move and work within a variety of spaces. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, I traveled regularly for my job -- averaging 500 miles per week -- to work at different educational sites within the northwest region of Oklahoma. During my drive time, I would regularly relisten to interviews or if accompanying a colleague, I would read and reread transcripts. As I engaged with the transcripts - on the road, between meetings, at home at my kitchen table, or in my backyard - I would make notes and reflect on the data and its connections to the emerging and unfolding themes. Ellingson (2017) states that "each time the recording is listened to and interpreted into transcript, the recording is changed, not just experienced" (p. 136). I found this to be true

because as transcriptions occurred, followed with repeated listens and analysis, new layers emerged for me. I had time to process, reflect, and read something new that allowed for a new perspective to seep through the data. With repeated listens, I also found myself focused on the pauses, background sounds, and halted speech or articulations. This allowed me to do a better job of fleshing out the transcripts to evoke a clearer picture of the time and space of the interview. With each listen or each reading, I traveled back to the memories of my experiences of the Walkout along with the experience of the interview.



(*Figure 7, The Work, Rhonda Harlow, 2020*)

Another significant context-based analytic force was the quarantines that emerged in March 2020 as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Analysis took place both before and during the spring quarantines and moved into the summer and fall, 2020. The spring was during the same period in which the teacher walkouts occurred in 2018.

Surrounded by spring growth and the glimmers of hope and rebirth was also the weight of human suffering as millions were affected by the virus. As visual memories of the Walkout's two-year anniversary emerged on social media, it was striking to see educators gathering en masse to protest in testimony to the power of democracy's right to assemble juxtaposed against the 2020 absence of people in so many public spaces in the wake of the quarantines. This marked a profound shift in perspective underscored that democracy through protest cannot be taken for granted. In a two-year timeframe, no protests at the Capitol were possible to represent the collective voice with the same freedom as prior to COVID. Within a few weeks of the quarantines, an eruption of protests emerged across the country focused on the Black Lives Matter movement. The importance of the cause meant that people willingly placed their health and safety at risk to gather.

Working with inductive analysis, I entered into the process with little to no preconceived analytical categories (Patton, 2015, p. 551). As I moved through and worked with the transcripts, themes and pronoun-usage patterns began to emerge in single narratives and with cross-narrative analysis (Patton, 2015). Inductive analysis produced insights into the contextual and personal threads of participants' experiences that crystallized into three interconnected themes: first, the role of emotions, bodily references, and embodiment during the Walkout (Bailey, 2012; Ellingson, 2017; Snowber, 2016); second, the dynamic conceptions of a "community" among stakeholders who participated; and third, the profound impact of the culture of teacher blame and devaluing of education among members of the legislature situated against the community affirmation of education value. For this theme, I turned to Flett's (2018) psychology of mattering to gain a deeper understanding of one's need to experience a sense of

significance and with that, feel as though one matters personally and professionally. These themes were illustrated throughout participants' individual accounts and wove across individual stories to offer a wider view of the themes and their collective significance to the Walkout as a historic event.

Memo writing occurred throughout the study. I utilized extensive memo writing and reflective analysis of my positionality within the study. Some of the reflective analysis and oral account can be found in Chapter VIII. As Ellingson (2017) states, "overlapping (referencing researcher and participant) encompasses both sameness and difference" (p. 21) and does not "...favor...one or the other but embracing both" (p. 22). It was with this understanding of intersubjectivity that I worked through memos. The memos focused on selected readings from my study and offered space for me to connect narrator accounts, topics, and themes and process through reflective analysis.

The number of chapters and the re(presentation) of the dissertation happened organically as the study took shape and understanding emerged. Although there is a natural overlap and weaving across the interconnected themes, it made sense to me to allow each emergent theme to have its own chapter and space in order to illuminate its own merits and value independent of the other emergent themes. As an individual who processes and analyzes using a myriad of visual supports, I included photographs, visual representations and/or analysis and found poetry to give additional support to the data and to serve as meaning making devices. I created data poems (Miller, 2018) from across narratives that highlighted the various threads that emerged from the analysis. I also created "found" poems from data units within single narratives (Patrick, 2016). From these poems, I was able to freely explore conceptualizations that surfaced through the

analysis (Allen, 2017; Miller, 2018; Patrick, 2016). I place some of these poems throughout the study to represent and bring key themes to life.

I then decided, in line with oral history, to dedicate one chapter (Chapter VII) to longer narratives from two different stories. Those stories encompassed all three of the themes I addressed earlier and allowed for a fuller representation of stories characteristic of oral history. Another tie to an oral history example is the chapter I included on my positionality (Chapter VIII) based on my reflexivity and intersubjectivity within the study since so much of this experience has been an overlap of me as the researcher and me as the participant-observer who shared in the Walkout experience (Ellingson, 2017).

Ethical Considerations

I ensured that ethics remained a top priority throughout the study. Once IRB approval for the oral history study was given, I began contacting people within my professional and personal network asking if they would be interested in participating. Prior to any interview, I reviewed and discussed the consent form focusing on the benefits of participation, participant rights, and researcher contact information. I also shared the intent of the oral history study. I reminded participants they did not have to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable and that they could halt the session at any time. I also reminded them that their participation was voluntary and that at any time, they had the right to withdraw from the study without any consequence and upon withdrawal, I would destroy the interview and transcript. No participant withdrew.

Each participant signed an informed consent form and gave written and verbal consent to participate. The risks to participate in the study were minimal. All participants were older than 18 years of age and demonstrated their understanding of the intent of the

interview. Six months after the study's end, I will contact participants who agreed via informed consent to see if they would like to gift their interview to the Oklahoma State University Oral History Archives. Following IRB procedures, I will erase all recorded materials not archived following final approval by the research committee. I de-identified any photographs shared by participants who gave written consent for photograph use.

As the researcher, I have overlapping identities with narrators. I engaged in reflexivity to offer introspection and scrutiny as a researcher. Within this experience there are multiple shared lived experiences surrounding the Walkout but there are also differing perspectives that give depth and breadth to the data. Understanding my layering and positionality, I do believe offered participants a safe space for sharing their stories and for giving them the security to be transparent with emotions. As Ellingson (2017) states, although research processes may not always surface emotions, they are nevertheless always present (p. 87). I find this statement to be true. Although during the interviews, I did my best to suppress emotional reactions, there were times when I found myself becoming visibly emotional. However, I did not fully display an emotional reaction until I was in my car, heading home, thinking, or relistening to the interviews during transcription. I also had emotional responses when analyzing and writing. Ellingson (2017) describes this as part of an "embodied" approach to research (p. 86). For me, conducting a study within the frame of interpretivism, it is neither practical nor feasible to step outside of the study to be an "objective" researcher.

Quality and Credibility

In this section, I discuss the steps taken to ensure the quality and credibility of my study by utilizing criteria established by Lincoln and Guba (1989). Lincoln and Guba

(1989) believed that constructivist inquiries required a system different from other areas of social science to determine its quality and trustworthiness. They described it as parallel to traditional social science criteria. Only some of Lincoln and Guba's (1989) criteria is relevant to my study given the effort to preserve the narrators accounts. My primary purpose was to move with my participants' stories which Briggs et al. (2012) believes is "useful in providing detailed information about particular groups' and individuals' lives, perspectives and beliefs" (p. 124).

The first criteria mark is credibility which Lincoln and Guba (1989) parallel to internal validity. Credibility acknowledges "the issue of the inquirer providing assurances of the fit between respondents' views of their life ways and the inquirer's reconstruction and representation of the same" (Patton, 2015, p. 685). During the Walkout, I was in the field with the participants and was able to use my field notes and reflexivity as part of the analysis process. My engagement with the participants involved the one interview session which included dialogue leading up to the recording and often ended with dialogue after the recording halted. I realize that for comfort, a needed experience for sharing of stories, to be established, multiple sessions are typically required (El Harch, 2015). However, in order to respect the narrators' time constraints, I chose to limit the sessions to one, unless a follow-up was needed for clarification.

Also, I was mindful to include people with multiple perspectives of the Walkout. Some perspectives include but are not limited to the following: individuals who worked in rural districts that did not halt instruction; individuals who attended multiple days at the Capitol; individuals who spent the majority of their time inside or outside the Capitol; individuals who did not attend at the Capitol but took action in other ways; individuals

who had not taken political action prior to the Walkout; and individuals no longer employed within education. I established quality and credibility by capturing and respecting multiple perspectives, using my own Walkout observations and reflective memos, and seeking contextual data from available news sources about the Walkout (Patton, 2015, p. 680). I offered member checks through the consent form with only a few accepting the opportunity to view their transcribed accounts. Most stated that due to time constraints, reviewing the transcript was neither necessary nor feasible for them. I also utilized triangulation analysis, which Patton (2015) defines as when "two or more persons independently analyze the same qualitative data and compare their findings" (p. 665). As my advisor interacted with the data, we discussed our individual reflections as understandings emerged. This process further expanded my analytic development.

The second criteria to consider is transferability which Lincoln and Guba (1985) define as the researcher's responsibility to offer enough information on what is being studied so that those who are reading can discern whether or not there are similarities that can be applied to other cases. Transferability, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) parallel to external validity, in an oral history study is less salient than in conventional social science research because oral histories are focused on collecting individual stories that collectively shed light on a shared event. So instead, I provided contextual information surrounding the socio-political climate in Oklahoma leading up to the Walkout so the reader could focus on the narrators' shared experiences within the broader social context of the Walkout. This grounded the accounts within their socio-political characteristics of the Walkout in the historical context (2018) in which the Walkout occurred. Even so, these narrators' accounts may resonate with others who participated in the Walkout.

The third criteria Lincoln and Guba (1985) detail is dependability. It means the researcher's assurance that the processes used are "logical, traceable, and documented" (Patton, 2015, p. 685). I followed oral history processes to support any findings or recommendations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and the dependability of the study. Also, Lincoln and Guba (1985) address confirmability, which is paralleled to objectivity, as "establishing the fact that the data and interpretations of an inquiry were not merely figments of the inquirer's imagination" (Patton, 2015, p. 685). This asserts that the researcher links the findings and interpretations to the data in ways that make sense to the reader (Patton, 2015). My goal here was not to mimic social science criteria or to claim objectivity but to lay out the accounts in such a way that the inductive analysis and common patterns were clear to the reader.

Persuasiveness is another component of quality in narrative studies relevant to my oral history, "constructed when narrators' experiences support theoretical claims" (El Harch, 2015, p. 4). Engaging with diverse accounts that offer the breadth of a phenomenon rather than a unified story can strengthen the persuasiveness stance. Some competing accounts, such as diverse feelings about the grass roots activists (see Chapters IV, V, and VI), complicate a unitary account of the Walkout and thus enhance persuasiveness. I also emphasize that these are accounts that are situated in a particular moment in time rather than an exhaustive reflection of narrators' experiences. Throughout the process I maintained reflective memos along with journaling that offered me the space to make links between the data and common patterns. I also engaged in dialogical processing with my advisor to either strengthen or redirect the links I had made.

Limitations

The number of people (22) I interviewed falls beneath the anticipated threshold for oral histories. As a methodology of preservation, and a window on to a historical moment, oral histories are often oriented toward representing a historical phenomenon by drawing from a broad swath of people who provide a broad view of the dimensions of the phenomenon. The narrators offer rich information about their experiences. However, I was unable to recruit participants from each of the Oklahoma counties (6 out of 77 were represented) or a strong representation of educators, staff, and leaders of color (4 of 22 were participants of color). The sample also represents snowball recruitment efforts through my OEA networks, which did not include, as far as I know, grassroots activists from the communities in Stillwater and Tulsa that participated in the April Facebook campaigns. Given that some narrators discussed tensions with those groups, having a sample that represented those perspectives would enrich understanding of the complexity of how participants' experienced voice, community, or a sense of mattering.

Logistics and timing were factors in carrying out this study. I was unable to collect as many oral histories as I would have liked due to participants' busy work schedules along with my own schedule as a full-time educational professional. The timing of the study proved to have logistical limitations when attempting to quickly access additional participants. For example, I sent a number of emails to possible participants that were not returned, or, were returned and we couldn't schedule an interview. The majority of the participants were interviewed within six to eight months of the Walkout and proved to be a reasonable number of participants I could manage in scheduling, interviewing, and transcribing in an acceptable amount of time. Ideally,

interviewing people multiple times throughout the course of the Walkout and in the years after would also enrich the perspectives of participants over time. This, too, became a logistical impossibility. In addition, I was respectful of the amount of time spent with narrators due to my understanding of their time constraints. Also, archival documents narrators may have collected were not included in this study.

Summary

The intent of this chapter is to outline the methods used for this oral history study with the understanding the process was fluid and offered me the opportunity to move in the directions that were revealed in the accounts. A discussion of the procedure, study participants, data collection, and interview questions outlined specifics of how I conducted the study. All participants contributed to the sparse scholarship surrounding the educator walkout movement that rippled across the nation in 2018. The next chapters will detail the findings that emerged.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS FOR THE EMOTION OF RAISING TEACHER VOICE

(Figure 8, Oklahoma City Capitol Protest, Doug Folks, OEA staff, 2018)

Over about a ten year period

(difficult to be a teacher in our American society)

Visited with lawmakers

-write an email - make contact - talk to an answering machine - invite to my classroom-

Lack of - communication - understanding - perspective -

Teachers weren't happy/Silenced by the lawmakers

Why weren't we being consulted where legislation was considered?

(by valuing the students, you value the teachers)

Couldn't hear us - weren't paying attention

hypocrisy of the legislators

Real anger and frustration

We're tired of this

If you're not going to listen - we'll make sure you listen

WE'RE WALKING OUT

a surprise to our legislators

How - exciting - inspiring - energizing - exhausting - this is for us

(It is not just for teachers - It is for kids)

being a part of the masses

EXCITED to get their voices out and having people listen

Letting people know now - attention we needed

This is important

then … it's over

-Anger - Shock - Deflated-

like a death had happened

But … it's not over - we must continue

Hope … Hoping … Hopeful

remind myself to keep involved

keep with pushing our legislators

show our political muscle

continue to be united in education

Hope … Hoping … Hopeful

Keep My Voice Heard

Interconnected themes emerged from the accounts that centered on, first, participants' emotional experiences during the Walkout in being seen and heard, physically and symbolically, and the Walkout's amplification of teacher voice; second, the expanding sense of community narrators' experienced through participating; and third, the feelings of public affirmation, respect, and mattering (Flett, 2018) as educators. I have separated these themes into three chapters. The findings for this chapter (IV) focus on the intense emotional and corporeal elements that surfaced within the data related to narrators' experiences. These findings highlight the importance of teacher voice. This chapter opens with a data poem (Miller, 2018) that I created from elements of 8 narrators' oral histories that highlight a variety of threads focusing on emotions and the desire for voice. Data poems offer a creative form of analysis and representation of qualitative research in which the researcher is given freedom to surface emotion and explore conceptualizations through analysis (Allen, 2017; Miller, 2018). These inductive threads include noticing the necessity and the power of voice.

The following threads emerged in the accounts: 1) participants' emphasis on emotional experiences before, during, and after the Walkout; 2) bodily terms and metaphors to describe various experiences in the Walkout; 3) Sensory elements of embodiment during the Walkout; and 4) bodies gathering en masse at the state's Capitol as physical representation of assembly (Butler, 2015). These emotional strands suffused the data and highlighted the meaning of the Walkout as a vehicle for educator voice and

action. Often educators jokingly state, “Do not make me use my “teacher voice.” In saying this, teachers are implying that when using their “teacher voice” they are preparing to emphasize a point. Participants shared emotions centered on educators and education not being “seen” or “heard” by legislatures over the course of several years. Their feelings of invisibility moved educators to step out of their classrooms and seek collective visibility and voice through assembly. The emotional thread is significant throughout the study’s other findings. Also, the narrators’ emotions seem to be catalysts for some who took collective action. As Butler (2015) contends, “resistance has to be plural and it has to be embodied” (p. 217). The emotions reflected in and across participants’ stories speak to their need for and experience of a collective teacher voice. Those same emotions propelled educators and stakeholders to assemble at the Capitol. In the space of the Walkout, the issues and concerns of education became “visible, audible, tangible” (Butler, 2015, p. 156) and the collective teacher voice that spoke to the Oklahoma legislature and stood in for the educational needs of a greater public.

Emotions Surrounding the Walkout

Emotions surfaced in the majority of participant stories about the Walkout. This embodied theme is important because participants’ emotions inspired many to take part in the Walkout to be heard and seen. Many described intense emotion in participating in collective action represented through the assembly at the Capitol. Participants used words such as “anger,” “frustration,” “exhaustion,” “energized,” and “hope” when discussing aspects of the Walkout. Notably, they also displayed emotions during the interviews in tears, halted and broken speech, and extended pauses. These emotions are vital components of participants’ embodied experiences in the Walkout (Ellingson, 2017) and

signify the need for and value of being seen and heard, collectively as educators. In this section, I will discuss the ways participants addressed emotions while discussing events leading up to and during the Walkout. I will also discuss emotions that surfaced while participants shared their experiences on the end of the Walkout and thoughts on education beyond the Walkout.

Emotions Propelling Participation in the Walkout

Emotions seemed to be a driving force for participants to take collective action. Many expressed their "anger" with the legislative body when discussing their decision to participate. A few months prior to the Walkout, Carrie spoke about sitting in the gallery at the Capitol while the legislature debated the possible teacher pay raise outlined in the Step Up Plan. She said, "our state representatives got up and spoke *so* poorly about education and teachers. I mean, I was so angry." Her anger continued when she talked about legislators making excuses for not voting for the Step Up Plan (2018) and claiming teachers were greedy for wanting pay raises. She stated, "I think *that* was the explosive moment that - Fine. We're walking out. We're *done*." Katie echoed Carrie's sense of anger with legislators prior to the Walkout as well. She said,

> I told a lot of people that, when we were getting ready to do the Walkout that once you go and you see it and you see the way that some of the legislators - they don't respect you. You will get that fire.

Cathy described her legislative involvement years prior to the Walkout when she attended one-day rallies held in 2014 and 2015 at the Capitol. She stated, "I was told point blank - that my representative voted his conscience and not the wishes of his constituents." When I asked how that made her feel, she said,

> Enraged because as a taxpayer and as a constituent and as an employee in his district and as a parent...just on education issues alone not even on looking on the outside of the scope of my professional arena - It was infuriating. It was demeaning that no one of any caliber was being included in his decision making. That just because he went to school, he knew what was best. And by that, I have gone to doctors, therefore, give me a prescription pad. You know that analogy doesn't work.

Jennie shared the same sense of anger when talking about Governor Fallin requesting teachers to show up on Monday, April 2, 2018 to thank legislators for a pay raise and then return to their classrooms. She stated,

> So I had the – 'I am not here to say Thank You' - sign and I chose that because the state government seemed so out of touch with its people (laughter) the fact Mary Fallin would even say we should come and say thank you was again, it energized a whole new level of anger in me. So I carried that same sign.

The placards that participants used were another expression of teacher emotion and voice.

While some participants expressed feelings of "anger," others noted their decision to participate was based on feelings of "frustration." Cal spoke about "the frustration of our members [referencing OEA members]" who "had seen the lack of results from our efforts for years and years." Cathy echoed these feelings when speaking about the build-up to the Walkout. It was…

> A couple of years coming where there was so much frustration and irritation with the educators and the staff and the faculty versus, I guess in my opinion, it was the legislators and the public. Lack of communication - lack of understanding - lack

> of perspective of what is really going on in the classroom. The 10-13 years of continually asking the classroom teachers to do more in the classroom through more students, more subject material, more testing, with less. Less supplies - less money available - less textbooks - I mean, absolutely doing more with less. It hit a (long pause) It hit a blockade almost. Like we weren't being heard and weren't being taken seriously.
>
> We as classroom educators, we truly were the professionals with the degree and the license and the professional development upkeep for being at the top of our game. Why weren't we being consulted where legislation was considered? Where funding could have been done? It just felt like there was a disconnect between the legislation and the career, the professional area. And if they were going to make laws about oil and gas, they consult with oil and gas. If they are going to make laws about criminal justice, they speak to lawyers and police officers. So why wasn't education being consulted?

Participants felt disrespected, dismissed, and devalued by the legislature. Cheila shared how she had visited with legislators over the years and was present for the defeat of the Step Up plan. She then "went back and talked more, and you know, with them and I was just getting frustrated with that process." Similarly, Jeffrey emphasized that the continued legislative dismissal of education's needs "was just getting really frustrating." Claudia felt "frustration over the budget...that reflects in teachers' salaries and that reflects in the resources." Matt also addressed legislative dismissal when he stated,

> Well the events go back ten years. This has been a build-up. From all of the cuts that the state has made to education funding, to the impact at our local school

> districts where we've been eliminating positions left and right for years, and we've seen class sizes go up and teachers feel the frustration of that.

Kevin echoed this accrued sense of frustration when Oklahoma "watched the teachers in West Virginia mount an effective and successful strike" and "the sense of frustration. I don't know if it was more palpable or tangible. It was just simply, we *hit* a boiling point. And so, the opportunity to try and finally force something simply presented itself."

Another emotion that surfaced was a sense of feeling "tired" that was associated with teachers' weariness from overwork, ongoing labor and pleas for support without any changes. It emerged from the continued legislative unresponsiveness to education's needs and insufficient funding, both personally and in the classroom. Denise said,

> I was tired of being broke and living totally paycheck to paycheck. I did feel like we needed a raise. I shouldn't have to ask my dad to put tires on my car. I'm a grown woman. Your money only goes so far so. It was that, but ultimately if the conditions in the classroom were better.

Letitia directed her emotion toward the legislatures when she stated, "Hey, we're tired of this. We are tired of not getting the funding we deserve for our kids." Kandee also spoke about the years prior to the Walkout that she had personally contacted her legislators and the variety of ways she had communicated her concerns about Oklahoma's education system. Legislators would thank her but would never address her concerns: "I think a lot of teachers were just tired of hearing all of that - Thank you but we're not going to do anything."

Other emotions centered around feelings of "sadness," "mistrust," "heartbreak," and "unhappiness" with failed political measures to provide additional funding for

education. Craig, a rural superintendent, spoke about text message conversations among superintendents prior to the Walkout and "the level of unhappiness amongst teachers who felt disrespected the entire session before and the run-up to this session." He continued to discuss the passage of the pay raise prior to the session that had not been fully funded and how he told his teachers, "I fully intended to tell you congratulations. You're getting a raise and there's no reason to walk now and I can't tell you that now because of the mistrust that I have for the legislative process." Cheila echoed this sentiment when she said, "I can't trust the process." For April, the failed state question in 2016 that would have resulted in teacher pay raise "was heartbreaking" because she "felt the entire state of Oklahoma" had set education back. Patti commented "we were down because our ballot initiatives, you know, had failed. We just really were beaten down." Carrie coupled her feelings of "anger" with "sadness" when she witnessed the failed Step Up plan. She stated she was "angry but just so saddened that no one had faith in education anymore." Kevin stated that "we were all emotionally crushed because that couldn't get passed."

Notably, the emotions experienced prior to the Walkout were focused on the lack of legislative support over the course of many years. As these emotions built-up, a few participants spoke of educators reaching a "boiling point" with the legislature. The West Virginia walkout was the needed nudge for some to move into action. However, interestingly enough, a few participants spoke of feeling angry and frustrated that they had been aware of the need for collective action for several years but did not feel supported by other educators until 2018. Matt stated,

> it made me proud to see my profession by means [of] stepping up but also reflected a little bit of anger and frustration that this is not something that just

> happened over night. This is something I have been dealing with and talking about for years that we have got to do something. The apathy among educators – Well, what are you going to do? We are taking cuts everywhere. Among people, we will just tolerate it. Well, teachers, it's just what we do. We are caring individuals. Yeah, it sucks to have 35 kids in my class that, you know, I'm still trying to teach them. It's like, I don't begrudge you for doing this, but what have you done to do anything? There was a little bit of frustration on my part that it took something like this for somebody to finally step up and do something when there have been people advocating change for a ten-year period.

Linda R. shared these feelings when she stated, "there really was some real anger and frustrations that came out as some anger toward educators who hadn't done anything for years while I had." Claudia echoed the sentiment when she stated, "we called them 5-minute advocates."

These varying degrees of emotions served as catalysts for some educators to move to collective action and participate in the Walkout. Participants had been waiting on the legislatures to do something over the course of many years and the continued legislative neglect propelled an energy that moved into action because they believed all other reasonable options had been exhausted. Although reasons for participating were described in emotional terms, the reasons were not reactionary. Many Oklahoma educators gained confidence from West Virginia and set aside their trepidation to engage in collective action. As Carrie stated, "I think West Virginia going on their strike gave us the gumption to be like – Okay they did it. They're okay. We can do the same." This

insurgency joined forces with long-time education activists embracing the "safety in numbers" opportunity to build on their years of education advocacy.

Emotions En Masse

Other emotions unfolded during the Walkout within and outside the Capitol building and within local communities who watched and supported Capitol events. They described emotions such as "anger" and "frustration" at continued dismissive attitudes of legislators also became directed toward OEA and its lack of internal and external communication. Kandee spoke of how legislators appeared stalled and did not want to pass any more legislation to help education funding. She stated, "I was so mad that if someone had handed me a $500 cashier's check, I would have gone and filed against my representative." Cari, an OEA board member during the Walkout and full-time release president for her local, addressed the problems with OEA communications in contrast to the social media groups. She emphasized, "communication is vitally important to me and I know that if you don't fill a hole or if you leave a gap someone is going to stand in it. And I think it's frustrating."

During the Walkout, participants' signs served as a means of conveying teacher voice and emotions. Judith Butler (2015), a feminist philosopher, states that "sometimes 'the people' act by way of … their iconic use of language; their humor and even their mockery take up and take over a language they seek to derail from its usual ends" (p. 157). Most participants commented on the wide variety of signs that manifested during the Walkout. Kandee emphasized their unifying force: the "signs really stand out to me because people were able to show their emotions and show their feelings on their signs...We saw them, and it was almost a unifying factor among people." Cathy noted

that “signs that were at the rally showed the pith and the intelligence and the anger and the rage that embodied this entire walkout.” She crafted different signs and traded them out daily. Susanna enjoyed the creativity of the signs while April had a “sense of pride of how witty teachers are. The signs alone. ...we’re just so incredibly bright and funny.”

Participants used words like “energizing,” “confirming,” “empowering,” “inspiring,” and “exciting” to describe experiences of gathering with other educational supporters. The physical excitement of feeling supported and experience of collective teacher voice surfaced repeatedly. Susanna spoke about the 110-mile march from Tulsa to Oklahoma City: “It was very exciting. There’s a lot of electricity … electric feeling in the air.” For Jennie, the first day of the Walkout was “so inspiring just to see...to be a part of a mass movement...I don’t think I’ve ever been a part of something that big before so that was very energizing...very exciting.” Kevin stated that the Walkout brought a “sense of optimism that we had finally figured out how to make sure that educators were recognized.” Cal, an OEA staff person who worked logistics inside of the Capitol, stated, “it was like an inspiration. It was surreal.” Linda H., also an OEA staff person who worked outside during the Walkout, said, “It was really exciting to see. … people who were really passionate about what was happening and about making their voice heard.” Cheila’s account echoed the sense of excitement when she said, “People were excited to get their voices out and having people listen.” For Cathy, her participation was a “boost of energy” and as “confirmation” that she “wasn’t just whining” because “it was an absolute boost of confidence that our public is fed up with our education system in the state, too.” April described “feeling a shift” and how she “became so excited. This is

incredible. There's change because you were getting out there and were talking to our legislators."

Another thread of emotion in the data addressed the physical and mental "exhaustion" of participating in a nine-day collective action against the state legislature. One participant addressed the "exhaustion" when she said,

> I don't think I've ever felt so drained. And the draining part was definitely going in and trying to talk to lawmakers. Sitting in Chad Caldwell's [referring to a state representative] office for an hour and being insulted and demeaned (laughter) was so hard. So, the next day, we all felt like we needed to be out with the crowds. I think he told us all of our facts were, well, he pulled the alternate facts card on us. So, even though we had done all of our research and had figures from the department of education, he told us that all the numbers were skewed and we didn't know what we were talking about. I believe, in fact, he said something like – You guys are so cute. So funny. You come with the same OEA facts and you just spout them off because you don't do your own research. – So even coming prepared, we were insulted. So that was probably the low moment.

April also addressed the mental and physical exhaustion tied to protest when she said,

> by the second week, I know it's hard to keep that kind of momentum going - that kind of fervor going - my husband even warned me, at one point, you know, you're going to come down and it's going to be hard.

When the event ended, Susanna felt "really exhausted" and described sleeping "all night and all day;" likewise, Denise stated she walked so much she was "exhausted."

To summarize, the emotions expressed in relation to participating in the Walkout spoke to the energizing feeling of support from fellow participants and the public and the sense of unified voice forged through gathering and protesting en masse. The emotions of "frustration" and "anger" with legislators persisted and extended to the flaws with OEA's communication that interfered with cohesive plans. Finally, participants shared their emotions centered around the mental and physical exhaustion of participating, which included the span of emotions experienced during the nine-day Walkout.

Emotions about the Ending: The Work is not Done

Emotions such as "shock," "anger," "disappointment," and "deflation" were used to describe the end of the Walkout. These emotions focused on OEA's abrupt ending to the nine-day event. When OEA announced the Walkout's end, April stated, "just for me personally, I became unhinged. It took me a couple of days because I felt like a death had happened." She continued, "I finally came out after just two days of just kinda sitting and weeping and I had time to reflect." Patti, the Tulsa Classroom Teachers Association (TCTA) President and a participant in the 110-mile march, talked about their arrival to the Capitol on Wednesday and the call for the Walkout's end the next day. She said:

> That was one of those life-changing experiences, and we were on such a high. And then we got one day at the Capitol, and then it was over, and we didn't handle it well [yeah]. We didn't (laughing). We were very emotional. As a local leader, I had promised my members that we wouldn't go back until *they* told me to, and that decision was taken out of my hands. I found out that it was ending. I was *on the bus* coming home and it was on my phone. And so, you just had a bus full of just totally disheartened people because, you know, they felt like they

> didn't have a say (voice falters with emotion). – Okay, you've had your fun. Now, go back to school. – Just kind of the way they felt.

This feeling of impotency that the Walkout had ended offered a striking contrast with how participating felt. Kandee spoke of watching the press conference at home and feeling "shocked like - What? We're not doing this next week?" Cari, another local president, described her feelings about hosting the scheduled town hall she had the day the Walkout was called, thinking,

> Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit. How do I face these people? What do I say? How do I make this okay? How do I keep them interested and involved because our fight's not done? How do we tap into that because the anger is important, too?

Jeffrey felt there was a missed opportunity of not by not extending the Walkout to the third Monday. He said, "that was disappointing… it was very discombobulating and did not sit with me." Linda H. spoke about the "real disappointment in people about how the walkout ended, and they didn't have much notice for it." Cathy stated, "so the way that it ended was so disappointing. It was a true let down." For Carrie, when OEA called the Walkout, she said, "We, as teachers, felt we were thrown under the bus because there *was* no communication. … like they just conceded to the legislature." Cheila simply stated "well...I almost felt a bit deflated." The feelings of shock and betrayal in relation to the Walkout's abrupt end reflects emotions tied to loss of control over the assembly's next steps. he emotions also underscore the interruption to the energizing momentum experienced during the Walkout, which offered participants a sense of control in community.

Emotions Moving Forward: Envisioning a Future with Changes

As participants discussed what they wanted to see for Oklahoma's education system after the Walkout, the emotion of "hope" was used by the majority while a few used "like" and "love." They expressed hope for continued teacher activism, legislative and stakeholder support, and engagement in the political process. Cheila stated, "I hope to see that we can continue to advocate on a larger scale then we have." Linda H. expressed, "I hope people won't lose that passion … I'm hoping that we can continue that." Cari also expressed the need for educators and stakeholders to continue with their advocacy when she said, "What I hope continues, is that people don't rest on their laurels. They now understand that people have power."

Susanna referenced the legislature when she said, "my hope is that they will give us more money." Carrie shared this feeling when she stated, "I would definitely like to see funding." Alicia spoke of people staying engaged and working with the legislature and that her "hope is we focus on funding our classrooms." Jeffrey noted funding: "my hope is that they'll come to awakening of what it actually costs to be top 10 in America." This "hope" for funding continued when Letitia said, "I am hoping we can start putting out a little more money - a lot more money - toward education." These participants viewed having adequate funding for support staff, classroom resources, and teachers' salaries as indicative of legislative support.

Participants also spoke of "hope" for increased awareness in the state for the education issues and concerns and that this awareness would translate into political engagement. April stated, "I'm hoping that...we can keep the communication open with our legislators." About the next steps for Oklahoma's education system, Matt said,

> What I hope to see is a legislature and governor that values public education, prioritizes public education, adequately funds public education, and establishes that as a new norm for Oklahoma. That Oklahomans feel that education is important enough to where we need to prioritize it and make sure that it is taken care of and involving many people in the process.

Jennie discussed the pending 2018 elections during her interview and referenced six legislators who voted against the teacher pay raise and lost in their primaries. She stated,

> I am watching November and even if we can't elect teachers, there's a few incumbents that have got to go. The primaries was very hopeful. I think we got rid of six that were very anti-education. We forced another ten runoffs. Coody and Cleveland [referencing legislators] are huge names. They are in runoffs now and so hopefully before the walkout, they were very arrogant and just acted as if nothing that they could do could get them voted out. They were almost. They couldn't be touched, and I think that we've at least showed them that they can be touch. So, I'm hopeful that trend will continue.

Craig also wanted to see teacher support through the elections. He said, "I hope everyone takes it to the ballot box." He emphasized the direct connection among teaching conditions, legislative control, and the power of elections. Katie stated, "I hope that we will get the right lawmakers in to consider education every year." Kandee referenced the importance of lawmakers' attention too when she said, "I hope that our legislators will keep their eyes open and ears open and will work more for kids and education funding."

Despite the emotions of "anger" and "frustration" that participants felt toward legislators leading up and during the Walkout, there was a prevailing sense of "hope" for

the future of Oklahoma's education system, that emotional investments would help propel. There was also the "hope" that educators would become more involved in the political process by voting. As Linda R. emphasized,

> We need to move forward. We need to work together and I'm not going to sit back on my haunches. I am paying attention to who's running and so in primaries that are coming up within days, I am voting where I can. I'm reading and studying those candidates. I'm talking to them. I'm asking what I call very pertinent questions and then I'm going from there. If we do not have people who understand the plight of what's going on in Oklahoma with education, then I don't want them representing me. Representing the state, the kids and what needs to be done. So, that would be my hope. My wish and how I am going to move forward.

Bodily Terms and Metaphors

Gibbs and Wilson (2002) believe utilizing metaphorical thought and language "provides the resource to understand ideas, events, and objects in terms of what is most familiar and well understood" (p. 524). In the stories, several discussed various elements of the Walkout through emotionally-charged bodily terms and metaphors. Narrators seemed to use this wording to emphasize experiences in common terms audiences might understand. The political process, Walkout participation, emotions surrounding the Walkout, along with other topics are described metaphorically with embodied action (Gibbs & Wilson, 2002, p.524). For example, Claudia used metaphorical language when speaking about the lack of educator votes in recent elections when she said, "We're shooting ourselves in the foot." This statement elicited the image of teachers not uniting and not helping themselves with the political process and therefore crippling themselves

professionally. As Jeffrey noted, “real education funding just kept disappearing...we were just getting choked and starved.” He also referenced the public’s perception as “people had banked that education was something you could starve and there would be no consequences.” This emotionally vivid language evoked a collective assault on teachers and teachers’ real bodily needs for “shelter, health care, and food” (Butler, 2015, p. 10).

Narrators used metaphors frequently when discussing interactions with legislators, the political process, and feelings leading up to the Walkout. For example, in discussing legislators, Katie said, “It was just...talking to a brick wall. He just wasn’t interested.” Linda echoed this sentiment when she discussed visiting with legislators prior to the Walkout as “falling on deaf ears.” Patti commented on how teachers felt “pretty beaten down” by continued funding cuts. As Denise reflected on the legislature, she stated, “Politics is really just kind of a one step forward, two steps...back almost… … I mean it was an eye-opener just to see the process.” This language reflects educators and stakeholders’ feelings of not being heard nor respected by legislators.

Common language and phrases surrounding the Walkout crossed multiple narratives. Kevin equated the decision for the Walkout to a boiling pot that “simply boiled over” because of continuing funding and legislative neglect. Linda R. echoed the imagery in his language when she stated that continued funding cuts was “the match that striked it and set it off.” This language offers a comparative example of how educators had waited for the legislature to properly handle education needs before taking collective action. Carrie went as far as to state she felt as though “education was just rubbed into the dirt” by legislative neglect. Cal further added to the image of neglect by comparing it to death when he said, “If you want to kill something, you take money away from

it...money has been taken out of...public education." Jeffrey carried the funding analogy further by claiming the legislature wanted education to "shake the couch that cushions enough we're going to get together enough change."

In response, teachers used their bodies as vehicles for protest and advocacy for education. One narrator remarked that participating was a clear form of embodied action and voice: "we're out there trying to make a point and get things done and we weren't just sitting at home sipping Pina Coladas." In this sense, action means placing bodies strategically and abundantly in visible spaces; action happens when bodies are "out there" rather than "at home." Matt referred to the variety of stakeholders metaphorically, when he stated, "Everybody has a dog in this fight" and when explaining events before and during the Walkout, Alicia compared it to a juggling act when she stated "there were a lot of moving parts and it's like being a juggler...juggling chainsaws." This vivid description of the many moving pieces conveyed her feelings of precariousness in keeping those pieces aligned. Alicia went on to comment that "the weight of the responsibility ...was almost unbearable." By referring to the Walkout as having a physical weight, Alicia was referencing the large burden of responsibility she bore in acting as OEA President. Linda R. compared OEA to a person when she spoke about OEA not putting its "best foot forward" when communication was lacking. She further added that, though poor communication was frustrating she also understood OEA has "many arms - many legs - many strands flowing out to something like this walkout."

A few participants used metaphors when discussing the decision to end the Walkout that conveys the intensity of the emotions they felt in its abrupt end. Susanna understood the need to conclude the Walkout at the Capitol and believed that if it had

continued “It would be like cutting off our nose to spite your face.” It had served its purpose in Oklahoma City and, if it had continued, parental and community support would have diminished which might have increased support for the petition to recall the legislative funding. Katie echoed this thought when she stated, “it was like something was in the air saying - it’s time to stop.” However, for some, the abrupt ending to the Walkout was more difficult to process. April stated, “Just for me personally...I became unhinged. I felt like a death had happened. … it is like a death because you’re ending something.” Jeffrey also commented on his displeasure at its ending. He believed members of the legislative body had been antagonistic at the Walkout’s end and he thought “we should have gone back one more day to give them a raised middle finger to say - You don’t talk to us like that.” For Jeffrey, assembling one final time on the Capitol grounds would have been a message of collective defiance to the legislature.

The findings provided support for the belief that when people think about and describe experiences and emotions, they will sometimes use embodied actions to process or derive understanding of abstract ideas and events (Gibbs & Wilson, 2002). Ellingson (2017) describes all information passing through and coming from the body. This notion can be carried further with the idea that “metaphorical concepts...are fundamentally embodied” and are used to understand “concepts from diverse domains of experience” (Gibbs & Wilson, 2002, p. 538).

Sensory Elements Reflecting Embodied Engagement

As narrators recounted the Walkout, sensory elements emerged in their descriptions. For several, these sensory elements provided rich, emotional descriptions. Participants commented on sounds, sights, temperatures, and color. As the opening image

of this chapter demonstrates, the Capitol scene was a sea of red (Figure 8). Narrators referred to multi-sensory dimensions, what Ellingson (2017) calls "the sensorium" (p. 14): the ocular, aural, vocal, tactile, kinesthetic, and proxemic aspects of moving in fully embodied ways. These sensory experiences included group chants, calling out to each other, hearing horns honk in support, singing, holding signs, laughing about witty placards, and moving toward, inside, and outside the Capitol building.

Support was sometimes audible as well as visible: "something as simple as the horns being honked" as cars drove by people gathering on street corners. Patti spoke of a participant on their 110-mile march from Tulsa to Oklahoma who had a little ukulele and he played as he walked and just sang songs. She spoke about how this felt uplifting while experiencing the physical and psychological drain of walking more than ten miles a day. Several spoke about the high school marching bands that attended along with the teacher marching band, a group of educators who formed their own marching band and played throughout the course of the Walkout. Also, as April noted, stakeholders often 'worked together' vocally: "People were singing. We were walking around the building. There was community. We are here to stay and that's it." These descriptions emphasized fully embodied engagement of Walkout experiences.

Others noted the packed bodies and sounds within the Capitol; April said, "there were people at the very top that would yell down to the third tier who would yell down to us." These sensory dimensions underscored the physicality of the protest through teachers' presence. April emphasized, "[the sounds emphasized] that sense of community...wow, this is really happening because *we're here*" (emphasis added). Voices and bodies disrupted business as usual at the Capitol. For Katie, "It was so packed

inside the Capitol and it took us forever to get in there, and they were yelling and the chants that were going on." Cathy commented on "the thunderous sounds," "the chanting and the applauding," and "the camaraderie of five floors of people." Being inside the Capitol, Cheila reflected:

> This was really unbelievable to me. It was the power of the people. The chanting that was going on and just the atmosphere. It was just like -- this is important -- hear us -- hear what we're saying and you're here to do a job for our state.

In this account, the metaphors of voice and hearing of people advocating for recognition accompany the resounding vocal and aural dimensions of physically working to be heard (Gershon & Applebaum, 2018).

The bodily demands of gathering for multiple hours over multiple days accentuated participants' intense commitment to the cause. Mike, who worked the outside logistics as an OEA staff member, discussed the nearly 12 hour workdays and having "sore feet...I realized my bones and muscles were not as strong as they were back in 1017 days (referencing his participation as a young teacher during the walkout regarding HB1017)." Linda H. spoke of the cold and said, "I was freezing out there, but I think it was hard work. It was stressful and very intense, but I think it was exciting and important." Denise noted, as did others, the sheer physical demands of being present, whether through traveling, the energy required to gather, or the demands of negotiating the crowd. She said, "We walked. I walked so much I was exhausted … just from all the walking and standing and you don't get to sit unless you sit on the curb." Katie echoed the physicality by stating "it was the longest days and it was cold." The sheer number of people was difficult for some participants. Carrie stated that "some with social anxiety

decided - I've got to step away." Letitia commented, "It was tough...How draining it is and emotionally and physically...I think we worked way harder than we would have any normal given day. So yeah, it was tough."

Some commented on carrying food and water, the need for bathrooms and food delivery from random supporters. These examples conveyed both the organizing necessary behind the scenes and the forms of bodily support they experienced. As Denise noted, gifts of food testified to recognizing and supporting bodily needs: "There were...people giving away peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. You did *not* go hungry, so I really didn't have to pack food." Mike commented on vans arriving in the bus lane with "40 pizzas for anyone" who wanted them and "people just show up bringing palettes of water for folks who were out there."

The Walkout required preparation. Denise prepared for her bodily comfort to the extent possible. She said,

> You know, I had my backpack all packed down from how I would pack to go hiking so I could have things that I needed to be accessible for standing out in the cold. Having layers that you can then shed. Cold then gets warmer. Rain jacket, you know, like a little roll-up jacket for the rain and stuff like that.

The weather was incredibly variable throughout the protest, adding to the embodied demands. Mike spoke about the variety of weather conditions during the days at the Capitol: "Sunburn. We all got sunburned. Windburned. It was always cold in the morning, got heated up by afternoon. The wind blew strongly every day. So, it was not the most comfortable." Alicia further described the unpredictable Oklahoma climate, "they had rain and snow and earthquakes, and I think there might have even been a threat

of tornado." Along with emotional ups and downs, the fluctuating weather was another aspect of narrators' embodied experience.

The Body Politic: Embodied Representation and Affirmation

Bodily presence was a symbolic representation of mass voice, action, and support on behalf of teachers and public education. Also visible in the data was that some bodies stood in for other bodies. The bodies present in the Walkout--moving, singing, shouting--represented the needs of the greater body politic in the state in relation to education.

Some supporters could not attend because of job responsibilities or school districts did not halt instruction and close schools. In a primarily rural state, others lived too far away to support a steady presence away from home or a demanding daily protest. Still others were children who represented actual and imagined students for whom protesters were advocating. Some students attend the Walkout in representation of their teachers. For example, Claudia reflected on a school that would not allow teachers leave to participate. The superintendent told teachers "I'll fire your ass if you go," so students attended in place of the educators. Those present symbolized concerns felt by others in the state and affirmed the reality that not all bodies can go. Both Matt and Katie referred to "substitutes" in the classrooms so they could participate while remaining connected at home. Matt reflected, "I attended ...for the two weeks...I was staying in touch back home so I could know what was going on locally from the teachers who couldn't' make it down to the City every day." Butler's (2015) theorizing of the politics of assembly underscores the representative power of bodies in this analysis. She writes,

> There is an indexical force of the body that arrives with other bodies in a zone visible to media coverage: it is *this* body, and *these* bodies, that require

> employment, shelter, health care, and food, as well as a sense of future that is not the future of unpayable debt; it is *this* body, or *these* bodies, or bodies *like* this body or these bodies, that live the condition of an imperiled livelihood, decimated infrastructure, and accelerating precarity (pp. 9-10).

In this sense, teachers' bodies gathering in protest echo the increasing precarity in the body politic that bodies in other public demonstrations represent in recent years. Moreover, teachers' bodies en masse also stand in for the educational needs of the children they tried to represent.

Yet, the mere act of assembly is an embodied act and many participants spoke of the vast crowds, diverse supporters, and collective presence as affirmation that they were doing the right thing by laying claim to the space at the Capitol and making their presence known with their bodies and their voices. In several emotional exchanges, for instance, Jennie shared,

> The first day was so inspiring just to see...to be a part of a mass movement … I don't think I've been a part of something that big before so that was very energizing, very exciting…and the emotional ups and downs started then. Because when we were out with the crowds it would feel like it something. It was something we could win. Something we could do. And then we would go inside and talk to the representatives and then just (laughter) realized that it was going to be a longer road than I thought. Monday (pause) So Friday…of the first week, we knew that we were really working on capital gains and there were a could couple of bills we knew we were really going to push hard for. The governor had come out publicly and said, 'okay, you've had your fun. Go back to school'—and so we

> felt like that following Monday was a very important day and so the second Monday of the walkout was one of the largest crowds. Well, without looking at numbers, it felt like the largest crowd and it was just a very powerful day and again, feeling like we can do it. Feeling like anything is possible being a part of the mass (pause) the masses.

Similarly, Denise emphasized bodily density: "I was just right in the middle of a massive crowd… it eventually got to where it was just packed… just couldn't see the concrete…I mean it was just people." Others echoed this image in speaking of a "sea of people," "there were more and more, more people involved every single day," and "it was so crowded and packed." For Linda R, "the crowd amazed" her on the first day and that participants were "real active." Kevin agreed, "it was awfully impressive to watch people and for the most part, for them to be engaged, to be listening, to be respectful...but...demanding to be heard and insisting on being a presence."

Sensory dimensions differed inside and outside the Capitol building. Several participants described the atmosphere outside as having a community-feeling that was more festive, filled with music, speakers, and participants walking around the outside of the Capitol. Several school districts claimed areas on the grounds and set-up tents identified with school banners. Within these communal spaces, supporters provided food and water. Letitia compared it to a "backyard party" and where she felt the "strongest connection" to the Walkout. Jennie fought back emotion when she spoke of drawing positive energies "hanging out with the crowd" after being inside the Capitol and feeling "insulted and demeaned" by her local legislator.

April stated, “Outside it was very much like the 60s...not that I lived in the 60s (laughter) but...what it must’ve been. Give peace a chance. There was community.” The outside atmosphere, though positive, had some limitations in communicating about events occurring inside with legislators. There were also limited WIFI services meaning those inside the Capitol meeting directly with legislators had difficulty communicating with outside participants. It also limited OEA’s ability to utilize technology to communicate while at the Capitol. Denise equated it to being at the state fair with its “spotty cell service.” This absence resulted in a communication gap which further compounded feelings of confusion and frustrations with the Walkout’s end.

Legislators could not disregard Walkout participants as they filled the Capitol halls and the rotunda. Participants ensured legislators could see and hear education’s issues and concerns by physically assembling. Cathy spoke of “throngs of people” which she believed held the legislators accountable because their work, or lack thereof, was visible to the participants, as well as the media. Denise stated, “It was so packed that you couldn’t get in, and that first day, it just got busier and busier.” Carrie echoed that description: “all the floors were just packed.” For a few narrators, the inside of the Capitol proved a challenging space to navigate physically. For example, Claudia, who typically sits in the Capitol gallery daily during regular legislative sessions, was unable to handle the crowds of people. She stated,

> It’s kinda fun to watch during the walkout when people would jam the gallery, but I didn’t get into the gallery those full two weeks. Never got close. I have a little bit of claustrophobia, and I was not comfortable, and I don’t trust the floor very much.

In Butler's (2015) work on the performative theory of assembly, she describes a student takeover of a university building and states "the symbolic meaning of seizing these buildings is that these buildings belong to the public, to public education" (p. 94). When the Walkout participants entered the Capitol, and as Cari stated, "confiscated the microphone...and started the chant, 'This is Our House'," the participants asserted, through embodied presence and voice, the territory of the House belonged to the people. Several participants believed that entering the Capitol enhanced their understanding of events because they were able to interact, or not, with legislators. Denise stated, "people that were inside seemed to be more; in-tune with the actual messages and talking [and] listening to what the lawmakers had to say." During the second week, April "felt more grumbling...not just from the participants...but from the legislators themselves." A lack of legislative interaction was also evident to those who made it inside. Kandee spoke,

> They kept the doors to the chambers closed. The senate and house chambers closed and they kept the door down their hallways to their offices closed but you, you could still hear everything that went on out in the rotunda. You could still hear everything. And the fact that everybody was working together toward a common goal – not exactly the same goal – but definitely a common goal, too, through education in Oklahoma and to improve everything for teachers.

She, and a few others, said they made their presence known through chants and singing. These acts of being seen and heard at the Walkout held significance due to previous feelings of invisibility. Kandee said "you could still hear everything that went on out in the rotunda." Katie talked of "yelling" inside while Carrie commented on "the chanting...at first I was like - this is kind of annoying. And I know they (legislators) were

getting irritated out on the floor...they were trying to hold their talks or whatever but see all these people." Cathy believed that "the more they (legislators) felt our presence - the more constraints that were put on our coming and going."

This detailed attention to the sensory dimensions in narrators' accounts underscores the importance of embodied protest and interrupting business-as usual at the Capitol. Prior to the Walkout, educators felt silenced and ignored by legislators. In order to be seen and to be heard by the Oklahoma legislature, they had to halt their labor, create an embodied absence from their classrooms, and take embodied action at the Capitol. As Butler (2015) notes, "If we appear, we must be seen, which means that our bodies must be viewed, and their vocalized sounds must be heard: the body must enter the visual and audible field" (p. 86). The protest accomplished the political act of being seen and heard. Ellingson (2017) states that "bodies or embodied selves are highly interwoven with the presence and actions of others' bodies" (p. 22), evidenced through narrators' steady emphasis on interactions. They became a collective body representing educators, their students, the education system, and the needs of a greater political body. This collective represented absent bodies from across the state (Butler, 2015, p. 70). As Kandee noted, "I think [the Walkout] brought education more to life for the public in Oklahoma."

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS FOR EXPANDING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

(Figure 9, Teachers occupying Capitol Building, Doug Folks, OEA staff, 2018)

The findings in this chapter address the various forms of community and unity that participants experienced and forged through the Walkout and that provided needed affirmation for participants. The findings also address some division among constituent groups. These elements intersect with the other two findings in Chapter IV and VI to help illuminate how participants experienced the Walkout as well as broader glimpses into this historical event, aligned with the study's primary purpose. The narrated accounts reflected dynamic and emotional conceptions of community salient for understanding

educators' sense of isolation and desire for recognition at the historical moment in which the Walkout occurred. Analyzing both within and across participant accounts surfaced varied articulations of the community to which they belonged, or they cultivated during the Walkout's intense landscape. Accounts reflected a common use of pronouns, a common shifting emic sense of a "we," a collective group with common interests that took varied forms. In addition, the data revealed fractures within communities which provided additional layers to understanding the community complexities within the Walkout. These shifting conceptions of a "we" emerged organically in analysis. The following poem highlights this sense of community for narrators:

I really felt like I was a lone voice – a vocal minority

(helping in some way)

Then – knowing there were other people out there who wanted to fight

I wasn't alone

Young teachers & End of their career

Retired teachers

Yes, we are teachers – thinking the same thing - showing solidarity

It is important for our voices to be heard

School leaders – Superintendents – School Boards

Wasn't just a bunch of complaining teachers

I wasn't alone

The people we trusted

Our children – Our families – Our Students – Their Parents/Grandparents

Began to see so many people coming out

Taking ownership – Community coming together for a common cause

I wasn't alone

Wasn't just a bunch of complaining teachers

All kinds of people stepped forward

Teamsters – Metalworkers – Community Members – Clergy

All kinds of Oklahomans

Amazing that other groups were willing to back us up

They wanted to help us

A strong support system that went outside the education forum

Communities truly stood behind us

For public education

We fought for the classroom

We fought for our kids

Wasn't just a bunch of complaining teachers

I wasn't alone

You could feel the power

Power of the People

The narratives reflected varied affinity groups often signaled through the participants' use of the pronoun "we." They included "we" who are teachers, "we" who are parents and/or children of educators, and "we" who are like-minded citizens gathering to protest. These fluid conceptions of community included fellow educators in their schools or those in other districts across the state and nation who they had never met. These conceptions never included legislators. Anderson's (1983) concept of "imagined

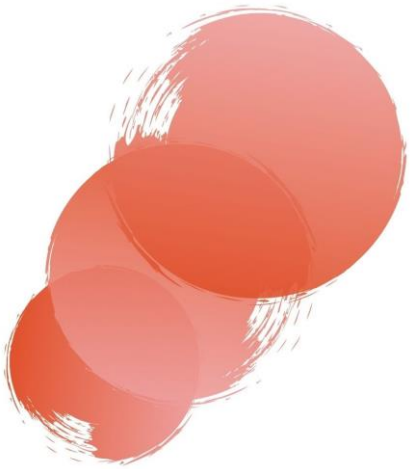
community" is salient to some conceptions of the "we" that appeared. This concept captures Anderson's analysis of such forces as print-capitalism that lead people to imagine themselves and others they will never meet as members of an "imagined political community" (p. 6) that nourishes nationalism. Although accounts did not mobilize an American sense of nation-ness, they evoked a sense of an "educational community" with those both known and unknown as Anderson outlined. In Capitol gatherings, attendance averaged 35,000 participants daily and media-capitalism (newspapers, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) expanded the scope of supporters. Importantly, the participants narrated connections to others in the state they had never seen, an imagined community of workers, teachers and Oklahomans who supported education.

Educators craved the affirmation found in this sense of collectivity after years of encountering legislative neglect. Simply put, educators were unsure if there was enough support to sustain the Walkout and felt dismissed by the legislative process. Flett (2018), a psychology professor, addresses the work of Seymour Sarason, a noted psychologist, when he states that a psychological sense of community includes a "sense of belonging" that allows people to "feel they fit in their community" (p. 271). Flett (2018) also addresses the work of Erich Fromm, noted social psychologist, when discussing a person's sense of societal mattering (p. 38). According to Fromm (as cited in Flett, 2018, p. 38) a person has a positive sense of societal mattering when s/he believes s/he has the ability to impact society through actions.

As I processed the varying conceptions of a "we" -- I am part of a community of educators; I am a part of a familial community; I am part of a community of stakeholders who care about education -- an image of these conceptions emerged taking the form of a

set of concentric circles radiating around and from the individual narrator who participated (See Figure 8). A version of this image emerged for me and for my advisor. We both drew it in our transcripts. I sketched and then colored the image to make sense of the proxemics of the relationships narrated in the data. Then I transferred the image to a digital image. I selected variations of the color red to represent the social movement, #RedforEd, that is a social media rallying cry for teacher activism (Burnett II, 2018).

I selected circles with undefined edges to represent participants' descriptions of different groups of "we" surfacing in the data and added slightly frayed edges to represent some fractures within those communities. The concentric circles radiating beyond the individual narrator expand from school spaces in which they work, to teachers whom they rarely see, and then teachers from across the state(s) who they may never have met. Other communities represented in the data were family generations and students and/or parents of students. The final sense of community represents the stakeholders supporting and assembling alongside educators with a shared common goal of improving Oklahoma's education system. There is overlap and transparency among the concentric circles to represent the interconnectedness among the community expansion. In this chapter, I will discuss the organic recognition of a supple and expansive conception of the "we" that forms through the gathering protest and that surfaced in diverse forms in most of the narratives.



(*Figure 10, Community Layers, Harlow, 2020*)

"We" who are Teachers

One conception of community was an expanding identification as an educator moving from the singular identity to the collective. A few participants described feeling alone in their activism prior to the Walkout. Claudia and Linda R., both retired educators at the time of the Walkout, shared a long history of political activism. Both experienced mixed emotions at the insurgence of activists showing up for the Walkout. Claudia stated, "For a couple of years, I really felt like I was a lone voice, that everybody else was busy...So, for a couple of years, I was the crazy one." Linda R. said she had experienced anger and frustration as the Walkout became apparent. She stated,

> It was a little war going on in my head and that revolved around the fact (hesitation). There really was some anger and frustrations that came out as some anger toward educators who hadn't done anything for years while I had. Which might be arrogant on my part. I don't even know. I choose to not really analyze that because my intent was not to be arrogant. My intent was (hesitation). Good night! What was it going to take to get you to understand that it's your profession

> and you need to be the one speaking up? So, there was a part of me that was angry. Put out. Just plain ticked off with a lot of educators who always seem to be willing to sit back and let me and several others kinda carry the torch.

Current educators also struggled with the sudden insurgence of activism. Cheila stated, "I kinda been fired up but felt it wasn't something I could do on my own. Obviously, what I was doing wasn't making a difference, and I did feel it needed to be a more powerful movement." Matt echoed those feelings with "This is something I have been dealing with and talking about for years." However, once the Walkout began and people assembled at the Capitol, the focus on individual experiences, or "me," began to move toward a sense of "we." For Cathy, "the walkout was like a boost of energy. It was confirmation I wasn't just whining, I wasn't alone, every teacher around the state has been thinking the same thing to some degree." Similarly, Matt said,

> You began to see so many people coming out, you may be felt a little safer in coming out and saying - yeah, you are right. This is wrong. Maybe it was just safety in numbers that brought so many people out.

Linda R. recognized the variety of educators who showed up. She noted,

> You see lots of educators...those who might be in their very first year of teaching to somebody who is retired like me to somebody who is, also, maybe at the end of their career but hasn't quite decided to get out because they have one last hope or ...desire to be in the classroom.

Narrators used the pronoun "we" to represent new collectives during the Walkout. For example, they described connecting with fellow teachers or administration within their own school districts. Katie created a Walkout sign with her co-teacher and met with

her superintendent to collaborate on scheduling times with representatives. Kevin and his co-teacher worked together to create an outdoor classroom on the Capitol grounds. Craig was most impressed with the camaraderie built within his district. He stated,

> The absolute thing that gives me goosebumps is that our kindergarten teachers walked around the Capitol with our senior English teachers, and they got to know each other. We're 400 employees with 200 teachers, eight sites. And people had worked in the district for 30 years, their entire career, and didn't know teachers who also had worked their entire career here. And so, there was this walking professional development that these teachers were getting from each other. And they would discuss – Well, I can't really comment about how to do classroom management for kindergartners but here's what I do with my seniors and that to me was eye-opening and that stands out.

This same concept of district-level togetherness resonated with Carrie who rode district-provided buses to and from the Capitol. She said, "On the buses...there was a couple of high school, middle school, lots of elementary [teachers]. So, it was nice to see an entire bus full of people just come together, share their experiences." Letitia echoed this sentiment, sharing, "I think it showed teachers could all stand together and get to know each other. That was really beneficial to our school where the high school doesn't really talk to the elementary schools and middle school." Matt spoke about seeing people wear their district's school shirts and how it evoked a sense of community. Letitia also felt that the Walkout allowed her to "know more and more of our teachers."

This sense of a collective "we" as teachers expanded to include an awareness of teachers beyond their own districts and to include a fuller sense of educators from across

the state and even the nation sharing the same issues, concerns, and wants for public education and its students. Kandee, from a rural district in northwest Oklahoma, spoke of "seeing all of those different signs and seeing it - *Oh*, they're from Tulsa but they have the same idea." Carrie saw fellow educators from college: "How exciting this is for us coming in as new teachers. Maybe we can help bring forth change and keep this going." This sense of connection was evident when Matt said,

> I think a meaningful experience I had was I visited with a teacher all the way from Guymon, Oklahoma way up in the Panhandle. I didn't know them. And I spent like 20 minutes just talking about what has been going on there in Guymon and in my home district. And realizing that commonality, you know, we are separated by great distances and the same is true when you speak to teachers from the metro areas. We all came across the same problems, the same struggles over the last several years due to the lack of funding. Just to reinforce, you know, it's not just me. I am not alone. I am not the only one—from Guymon over to Tulsa over to the Oklahoma City area—we are having the same problems, the same experiences, and we are all there for the right reasons. That just gave me significance. It validated in my mind why we are doing this. It is not what the media has portrayed or have been today that teachers are just in this for the raise. There was not a single person I met or talked to you that said they were in this for the money. I am doing this for my kids. I am doing this for my classroom. I am doing this for my school. That made me very proud to be an educator and to be involved and to participate in this

The interaction reduced his sense of isolation and solidified his sense of community in action: “we are all there for the right reasons.” Kandee recognized the broad value of the Walkout when she said, “all teachers in Oklahoma and all school employees benefit from what we did.” The common goal of the “we” at the Capitol was “to improve everything for teachers.” April referenced teachers’ experiential connections, sharing, “I always liken teachers to war buddies because we know what we go through and nobody else does. So, you see a teacher and you’re like – Ahhh, you know my story.” This feeling of unity and solidarity despite not having a personal relationship with someone was represented when Cathy spoke about the Tulsa teachers marching into the Capitol. With halted speech and through tears, she spoke,

> Teachers that came from Tulsa on foot to the Capitol (chokes up and begins crying) I can’t believe this is affecting me. Gah. I wasn’t even there when they arrived to see it. It gave me goosebumps to know that teachers who are on their feet and who are exhausted mentally and emotionally, would use this time to put themselves physically under duress to make a point. That they would walk that distance to get national and international attention and that fact that our state is pathetic and in education ruin.

April summed up communal connections by stating. “[What] I felt every single day was the community - the community - the togetherness. It was like I found out I had many teacher friends that I never knew I had before or people who understood.”

“We” who are Parents and/or Children of Educators

The “we” also included teachers’ cross-generational familial connections such as roles as parents and/or children of educators. Many of the participants had children and/or

grandchildren within the school system, and a few had adult family members, such as in-laws, who were teaching at the time of the Walkout. Most narrators had a family member, such as a parent, who had been an educator. Because some participants used the possessive pronoun "my" to refer to students or parents, I have placed findings including parents or students coming in support of educators within the familial sense of community. As Matt said, "I am doing this for my kids."

April emphasized her family's role in education: "My father was in education for about 44 years, and so I was raised as a teacher's kid." In her narrative she recounted her father taking part in the HB1017 walkout in the 90s. She then extended this description of a familial community when speaking about her own children attending the Walkout with her. She said,

> My son came, and he, too, is an introvert who doesn't care [for] crowds but he did come and wanted to walk. But I brought her (daughter) because she wanted to come and to be able to share that with her because not only am I her mother, but this year, I was her teacher in the classroom and so to have the opportunity. So, she sees how I teach in the classroom. Then to have her come and support me. She wasn't just supporting me; she was supporting her teacher and the other teachers she has had. That meant the most to me to have that experience with her and to share that.

Cheila having her daughter there allowed her to experience "an empowering event" while Letitia witnessed her daughter "talk to someone from the legislature...For her to see that there can be a way to fight what you need to fight for without violence." Craig and Claudia both referenced their grandchildren attending the Walkout and the impact it made

on them and the children. Claudia said, "her sign was 'I'm your future'...I think perhaps...we have awakened those young voters and they see what's right." Craig spoke of his granddaughter riding the bus with her mother, his daughter-in-law, and her teacher to the Walkout and reflected, "That's a lifetime of going to the Capitol and seeing what real advocacy and activism is." Cal also discussed his daughter's attendance with great emotion and tears when he said,

> My daughter being there. I cry every time I talk about it. So that was, for me, was just seeing her transformation. She sees what is supposed to happen whenever things aren't happening like they're supposed to, and she knows how to positively affect her world. It pulls my heartstrings so much...that's the first thing that comes out of my mouth, but now I know that she can...she can defend herself.

These experiences represent a vision of unity, a sense of families, educators, and others coming together for a common cause, forging a new sense of community in the process.

"We" who are Like-Minded Citizens Gathering in Protest

As the narratives unfolded, participants spoke about the "we" represented by the stakeholders who gathered as like-minded citizens of the political process to protest Oklahoma's lack of education funding. This visible collective felt deeply affirming. Some narrators referred to supporters, whether educators or not, across the state and nation including organizations in support of the Walkout. April described communal connections extending beyond teachers and family. She recounted,

> I went down with my parents and my children and to see that many people in one place behind one thing and different walks...and different types of people, too, not just educators...I have never felt such an outpouring of community ever in my life.

Claudia recognized the importance of community support in stating, “the beautiful thing about this is that we did have support of our school boards, superintendents, teachers who’d been saying the same thing and hadn’t gotten anywhere.” The expansive support, including the school board, was visible when Matt said, “It wasn’t due to a vocal minority that was doing this. It was a state-wide effort of teachers, administrators, parents, and community members, members of the clergy, all types of Oklahomans” who gathered to represent educators. He emphasized, “They don’t know one another but they are all there for the same reasons. And not everybody here is an educator.” The Walkout both *involved* diverse collectives of people and *created* new configurations as well who gathered to ensure the future of Oklahoma’s children and education system.

The awareness of widespread support was vital for participants after feeling ignored for years. Cal believed the Walkout brought a political awakening at the state level “where people are actually paying attention to what’s happening at the Capitol.” Jennie expanded on this concept of awakening when she said, “I am proud of the mass movements nationwide. I think it woke a lot of people up.” Carrie also felt the Walkout had impacted beyond Oklahoma and expanded connections to other states when she stated, “We’re getting national recognition. People...are seeing what we are seeing...and that’s a good thing...*we need the public to see*” [emphasis added]. The sense of expanding a communal “we” overlaps with support for bodily needs noted in the previous chapter, such as businesses and community organizations providing free meals and education colleagues from around the country “donating to a fund so that we (OEA) could buy food and have it brought in every day.”

During the interviews, several of the narrators showed emotion when speaking about like-minded organizations, such as labor unions, who showed unity and solidarity with educators during the Walkout. As Kandee spoke with a broken voice and through tears, she said, "It was so amazing that other groups were willing to back us up. They knew what we were going through...It was just amazing that...The Teamsters...showed up to support teachers." Similarly, Jennie and Cheila also spoke of the steel workers who stood in solidarity and ceased renovations on the Capitol building during the Walkout. April acknowledged,

> That was really neat to have the support of not just the Teamsters but the other (pause). Sorry, of other individual like the (pause). Oh, what was it? There were individuals there to work on the Capitol [*steelworkers?*] Yes! Thank you, sorry, the steelworkers there and to watch them sit out and had other organizations. That meant the most to me and that made me aware as a citizen that I need to think about that when others go on strike. It made me very empathetic of others that (pause) like I need to not just keep my head in education hole but I need to look out among the community and go – Okay, who else needs help? I can help them as well. – That really meant a lot. That was very emotional to watch them sit out or watch them to walk but not cross the line. I watched that. That was really amazing as well. steelworkers there and watch them sit out. That meant the most to me. That was very emotional to watch them sit out and watch them to walk but not cross the line.

Several narrators discussed the value of Teamsters' support. Alicia stated, “the Teamsters supporting us...that’s community support. That’s union working together and being in support of one another.” Linda R added,

> Union has become such an ugly word in our country (pause) I don’t think anyone understands what unions did for people. … I tell you in good and bad times, people like these men who are from the Teamsters, they stood alongside a lot of groups to let them know they are their brothers and sisters and they know something needs to be done.

This sense of unionism, even family (“brothers and sisters”), and solidarity connects to an understanding of collective bargaining and to Oklahoma as a right-to-work state. Cari linked this principle to the Walkout. She said,

> All of this speaks to the importance of collective action, collective bargaining, why it’s important to stand as a united force...had we not done this, had the threat not been there, the raise never would have happened for support or for teachers.

Butler (2015) states “the rights to assembly (or associational rights) are tied to the rights of collective bargaining” because the choice to assemble is to negotiate working conditions along with other demands such as job safety, security, and protection (p. 157). Kevin’s account reflected Butler’s ideas when he referred to the Teamsters’ support:

> Just the idea that other organizations that believe in collective action and collective bargaining were supportive. I think that was incredibly helpful. Some people in the legislature who would have been absolutely fine with shrugging off the teachers...especially because they have such a history of low voter turnout. Then you started seeing other organizations. I think that got under the skin of

> some of those folks who traditionally voted against education legislation. That's one of those things I don't know could be or should be understated. Especially in a right-to-work state. I think that's the other thing that can't be undersold. That every single one of those groups that decided to take an action like that faced legitimate reprisal for it. That can look or feel symbolic, but they can be far more tangible for those individuals. It's a calculated risk on their part and that shouldn't be underappreciated.

However, a few participants did not draw connections between Walkout support of labor unions to union solidarity. In fact, one teacher admitted it was the first interaction she had with the Teamsters and prior to the Walkout, she had "never really been aware of them." This speaks to a lack of immediate connection to or understanding of teaching as labor. It also indicates a need to build on union awareness and union connections within Oklahoma. April acknowledged her lack of union connectedness when she discussed the Teamsters' Walkout support along with other laborers. She stated, "That made me aware as a citizen that I need to think about that when others go on strike."

It is worth noting that West Virginia, consistent with its labor history, organized around a labor message and was successful in closing all school districts in the state (Blanc, 2019). Oklahoma did not accomplish state-wide school closures and was not able to have full participation of district personnel, teachers and support. The inability to have full unity among educators and support personnel further underscores the need to build on union awareness within Oklahoma.

As the Walkout took shape and societal support was evident, narratives reflected the feelings of being "energized," "engaged," "united," because events reflected and

created diverse collectives of "we," that affirmed the educators' mattering (Flett, 2018), a concept I discuss in greater depth in Chapter VI. This renewal of mattering to other educators, familial groups, other teachers in other states, other like-minded organizations resulted in an insurgence of hope for Oklahoma's education future

Frayed Edges of Community

Overall, participants described a sense of unity from community. However, fractures within community also surfaced from the data. Butler (2015) addresses fractures when she asks, "Can we ever really know who the "we" is who assembles in the street, and whether any given assembly really represents the people as such?" (p. 156). Some narrators noted a sense of division between OEA and the grassroots social media groups that organized virtually many educators across the state. Narrators also noted a clear difference among participants who were politically engaged prior to the Walkout compared to participants who were not as politically aware or involved until the Walkout. This wide range of political awareness extends to participants' understanding of the nuances within the political process. In addition, some participants discussed internal tensions within and outside of OEA during the Walkout. Blanc (2019) claims that such tensions, what I am calling "frayed edges within community," deterred the Oklahoma Walkout from reaching its full organizing and mobilizing potential (p. 105). Despite having grassroots activists, Oklahoma's lack of "militant teacher organizations" (Blanc, 2019, p. 105) proved to weaken Walkout efforts. Militant organizations willingly engage in confrontational activities such as strikes. In West Virginia and Arizona, this militancy faction benefited their job actions. However, the void of a unified and militant mindset is apparent in the Oklahoma Walkout when narrators discussed the internal tensions among

the grassroots social media groups and OEA. Also, these tensions meant that the Walkout was not as organized and cohesive as it could have been. Matt described some tensions between grassroots social media groups and OEA. He said,

> I think what I struggled with was the competing organizations and the competing ideas ... and some of the in-fighting [from] some of our coalition partners -- whether it is specific organizations or it's social media groups that were started -- that didn't help.

He went on to say that the "fight" should have a unified same goal and that the in-fighting created division and distractions due to "competition for top-billing."

Craig similarly referred to the social media groups when he said, "there was a rise of social media-born experts, who weren't really experts, that were angry." He viewed the groups as a negative side to the Walkout and referred to some in the groups as "those people who didn't have a clue" about the political process. For example, there was a lack of understanding within the social media groups on Oklahoma's collective bargaining laws regarding the prohibition to strike. Claudia's thoughts were similar to Craig's, stating, "the people are yelling, 'Strike, strike, strike'. Do you understand Oklahoma is a right-to-work state and striking is against your district?" According to Claudia, the "amount of misinformation" and miscommunication resulted in no clear Walkout leader. She went on to compare the Walkout to the 1990 HB1017 walkout when she stated, "That one [HB1017 walkout] was different. There was one solid voice. And that voice was OEA."

To some, social media groups' communications were a problem. One equated the groups as filling a hole in the communication gap left by OEA which resulted in unclear

Walkout goals and messaging. Kandee echoed this opinion, "it caused some division and some back-talking and cast a bad light on some people in the state."

However, other protestors chose to act because of the groups' social media organizing. For Letitia, she was not aware of the Walkout until she "got the email to join the Facebook - *The Time is Now* - group." Carrie credited the grassroots social media groups for "rallying teachers together and trying to figure out … -*Why* do we want this walkout? What do we want?" She also believed the social media groups forced the Walkout. She commented, "I honestly don't think OEA would have gone through with a walkout." Later, she thought the OEA "just conceded to the legislature" and expected educators to "go back into the shadows." Carrie believed that OEA did not want teachers to have a collective voice outside of the union's messaging.

A few narrators described their advocacy and activism over the course of many years and their emotions toward fellow participants who had not been involved with the political process until the Walkout. Their perceptions that other teachers were not sufficiently aware or involved left some participants feeling "angry" and "frustrated" at the apathetic stance other stakeholders appeared to have prior to the event. Linda R. said, "Okay step forward now and where were you when we had all of these wonderful people out there trying to say they were going to help." She continued with this:

> That anger was saying - you've done your part. It doesn't matter that you have grandchildren still in school. Some of your best friends are still in the classroom and teaching. You're just going to sit back and not get involved.

Linda R.'s "anger" toward those who became involved as the Walkout began caused her to delay her participation. Similarly, Matt stated,

> This is something I have been dealing with and talking about for years that we have got to do something. … There was a little bit of frustration on my part that it took something like this for somebody to finally step up and do something when there have been people advocating change for a ten-year period.

Claudia, who described her lobbying efforts over several years, expressed her frustration with the "5-minute advocates" who "don't understand the history of what happened" and "haven't made a relationship with these people [referring to legislators], so they listen to you." While some voiced anger and frustration with those who had not been involved, Cheila saw the opportunity to "just motivate and support the people that were there and give them some feedback." Susanna recounted people wanting a t-shirt to commemorate the Tulsa Teachers March although they had participated a limited amount of time. With mild annoyance she stated, "There's the people that just try to hone in on that kind of weird thing but it wasn't just two or three; it was like twenty."

Kevin described the various nuances of the visible and invisible aspects of the political process during the Walkout related to meeting with legislators to discuss funding. Kevin equated the meeting as "a particularly startling moment for me because it was [like] somebody pulling back the curtain...and saying - Okay, so there's been a room where it happened [referencing the *Hamilton* musical]." Kevin acknowledged much of his insider information originated from years of extensive political involvement and that information was difficult to communicate to other stakeholders because "the people involved in the backroom agreement will never [corroborate] say on record." This dynamic made it "tough for teachers to understand" the historical situatedness of this moment, if they did not have an established political awareness prior to the Walkout.

A few participants experienced the Walkout as a catalyst for political involvement. Letitia admitted that the events leading up to the Walkout "caught me off guard. I guess I was just so involved [with] what I was doing in the classroom that I just wasn't paying attention to the politics outside of the classroom." Katie described attending a legislative session for the first time in February 2018 that started a "fire" in her to become more politically involved when she personally witnessed the dismissive nature of some legislators. For a few narrators, their lack of political involvement was grounded in the demands of teaching. Susanna stated, "We're always too busy. … we never get a chance" to attend legislative sessions or go to the state's Capitol. She, along with other participants, found the Walkout to be an educative experience about the political process and the need to sustain education activism.

Several participants described issues with OEA, which deterred external communications with rank-and-file members and nonmembers, along with internal communications with staff and leadership. This scenario speaks to the broader historical context of the Walkout. Blanc (2019) described this obstacle as the "divide between union and nonunion members" (p. 59). This divide, evident throughout narrations, also increased confusion. OEA had some structures in place for communicating with members but rarely communicated directly with nonmembers. Most members and nonmembers gained the bulk of their information from the social media pages that did not have OEA ties. Also, several OEA members did not have updated contact information on file, rendering it difficult for OEA to send out emails or mass text messages.

In addition, OEA had not clearly communicated the *Together We're Stronger* (TWS) campaign prior to or during the Walkout. As a result, members and nonmembers

turned to OEA for information, which tested those structures. Cal, an OEA staff member, stated, "This [referencing the *TWS* campaign] is over a three-year process...which...that's one of the things that we [OEA] neglected to communicate very well." It was evident there were gaps in the internal and external structures of the association. Linda R. noted the gaps, "I do believe that we need to recognize that OEA is made up of all these individual teachers...it is hard to get us to all agree on something." She continued with saying, "I felt like, a few times, maybe OEA's best foot forward was not there in letting all of us involved know what was happening and why it was happening."

Patti also experienced similar feelings regarding OEA's Walkout communication. As the TCTA President at the time of the Walkout, Patti worked with her district's administration to organize educators around the 110-mile Tulsa Teacher March. As the planning started, she commented that "we're going to drag OEA in." She continued with how she and the district's superintendent "twisted their [OEA] arms and said - This is going to happen, and you *have* to lead it." For Patti, a long-time OEA member and leader, OEA's hesitancy was "interesting" especially since public support was evident. She stated, "If we don't lead it, we're going to get trampled by other people" indicating educators expressed the desire for collective action and strong leadership.

Cari served on the OEA board of directors and as a local president during the Walkout. She expressed her desire for OEA transparency and described inviting her local members to attend an OEA board meeting during the Walkout. She stated that the "room was packed. And it was, I'm sure, threatening that there were other people in that room and people got really angry." The anger from her local memberships grew to the point where people considered picketing the OEA office. Cari shared how she was able to

counter that action but at the same time regretted "that communication was not as effective as it could have been/should've been." She believed "people wanted direction and didn't feel like they got it" from the OEA.

The abrupt ending of the Walkout also created tensions among OEA, its members, and nonmembers. Patti spoke of the high of experiencing the Tulsa Teachers March arriving at the Capitol and then learning the next day the Walkout was over. She reflected, "We were very emotional. As a local leader, I had promised my members that we wouldn't go back until *they* told me to and then that decision was taken out of my hands." When she learned of the Walkout's end, she was returning home on the charter bus full of "totally disheartened people because...they felt like they didn't have a say."

Even OEA staff working the logistics found the Walkout's end to be abrupt. Mike, an OEA staff member stated,

> Well, I think we had met the goals that we wanted to set and I do believe we achieved those goals, but I think there, there was a lot of frustration, mainly because I believe the stopping of the walkout was done a little bit abruptly. I think people did not see it coming. Every day we had people kinda give reports at this stage that was on the southside of the Capitol. And it was kinda like, you know, we're here for the fight. We're going to keep going until we get everything we want. And, I think, in many people's eyes we stopped before we met all of our objectives simply because they believed we were going to keep going until everything was solved. And we know in the legislature, that's not possible. So, I think, folks were very frustrated when it ended. I, myself, was kinda caught off guard a little bit. We [referencing OEA staff] heard late afternoon one day that

there was going to be a press conference, like in 30-minutes, and that it was going to be called. So, even as a staff person, I felt like we were a little bit unaware until it was actually called.

Linda H., OEA staff member, found the Walkout critics to be hurtful when they stated educators "didn't get anything." She stated, "you can say the communication wasn't great and we (OEA) can work on that...but what we did was important."

Although the sense of community had fractures, it did not squelch the affirmation of unity in supporting educators and public education. As participants addressed their emotions surrounding these fractures, which are common in any collective action, they circled back to assessing the experience as educational and an opportunity to improve. As April stated, "I think everyone needs to be graded on a curve because who of us have ever gone through anything like this ever."

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS FOR EDUCATION MATTERING

(*Figure 11, Oklahoma Teacher Walkout protest sign, Doug Folks, OEA staff, 2018)*

Will you please listen?

This has been a build-up

for 10 years

A lot of politics that led up to this moment

Oklahoma has always been at the bottom

the state has chosen to maintain the status quo

real education funding just kept disappearing

We were just getting choked and starved

which made our jobs much more difficult

It has reached a point of frustration

Will you please listen?

Absolutely no responsiveness from legislators

State representatives spoke so poorly of education and teachers

Some just turned around and walked away

So saddened that no one had faith in education anymore

We're tired of being last.

Will you please listen?

We need the public to see what we're seeing

Our political offices need fresh blood.

Hold our elected officials accountable

for our children … our future

We're so fed up.

We're done.

We're walking.

Will you please listen?

The findings in this chapter focus on the concept of "mattering" which Flett (2018) attributes to understanding the human need to feel significant. This "mattering"

concept connects to participants' wishes to have their teaching labor respected, their advocacy on behalf of students' rights to have a quality education, and their interactions with and perceptions of the Oklahoma legislature. In this analysis, the Walkout proclaimed that students and teachers "matter." I have compiled this data poem from 3 narratives (Miller, 2018) to provide a window into the participants' experiences of assembly. The poem conveys how participants sought public recognition, but particularly by legislators, who could enact reform and support for schools, and in the process affirm that they matter. The poem surfaces, as well, intersecting threads of this chapter theme, that "education matters," and the themes of teacher voice and community discussed previously. The data poem evidences the intensity of their psychological need to feel heard, to feel like their mission matters, evidenced through their plea: "Will You Please Listen?" This plea frames teachers' desire for their voices to be acknowledged among the legislature and education stakeholders.

In this chapter, I draw from the data varied components of Flett's (2018) concept of psychological mattering in relation to Walkout accounts. Participants variously felt outrage and despair that education did not matter sufficiently in state priorities and insisted, through walking out, that education does and should matter to all Oklahomans. As discussed previously, this dismissal of public education and children's rights to a quality education shaped stakeholders' collective decision to take action. While West Virginia's walkout drew on its long history of labor activism to protest teacher and support personnel pay and health insurance issues, Oklahoma organizers framed their work stoppage differently. After receiving a historic pay increase (Blanc, 2019), Oklahoma educators' demands focused on students, classroom resources, and staff

support, among other issues, such as a funding plan for a teacher pay raise. Many viewed this action as a "politically adroit move" when "the union pivoted away from a focus on pay demands by foregrounding the fight for funding" (Blanc, 2019, p. 156). Here I draw from Flett (2018) to explore elements of mattering in narrators' accounts and the desire for teachers, staff and supporters, as agents for the quality of children's education, to feel like they matter to others at a systemic level.

Flett (2018), who studies the psychology of mattering, indicates that the psychological feeling of mattering, or in contrast, antimattering, can be related to group or individual experience (p. 3). Both foci surface in the data. Components associated with a sense of mattering are as follows: importance, attention, dependence, noted absence, appreciation, ego extension, and individualism (Flett, 2018, p. 31). Within the narratives, many participants touched on at least one, if not multiple, components of mattering/antimattering aligned with Flett's terms. Components of mattering as follows: 1) attention: "feeling that oneself and one's actions are noticed by others"; 2) importance: "feeling of being significant to someone who cares about you"; 3) dependence: "feeling of being important because others are relying on you"; 4) ego extension: "recognizing that someone else is emotionally invested in you and what is happening with or to you impacts them"; 5) noted absence: "feeling that you are missed by someone"; 6) appreciation: "feeling that you and your actions are valued and matter to someone else"; 7) individuation: "being made to feel unique, special, and centered on by someone based on how they regard your true self" (Flett, 2018, p. 32).

Some narrators emphasized that legislators did not care about teacher input and needs. This lack of importance, attention, and appreciation can be tied to the earlier one-

day rallies that brought supporters to the Capitol but concluded in no legislative results. While a few supportive legislators may have shown a vested interest, or ego extension (Flett, 2018), in education and teachers at those rallies, the majority stayed behind closed doors and were unavailable. Flett (2018) views ego extension as the ability to recognize others are vested in you and the events that happened with or to you also impacts them (p. 32). In addition, years before the Walkout, per pupil funding decreased, pay raises were nonexistent, and education funding eroded, which left teachers believing the legislature was not giving education the attention it deserved. For the legislature to acknowledge the value of teachers and education, teachers had to collectively emphasize their absence from classrooms to highlight society's dependence on their profession. Flett (2018) states "We really should not be surprised when large groups of disaffected people engage in demonstrations or activities designed to remind people that they actually do matter and that something needs to change" (p. 4). The Walkout evoked feelings of mattering.

While feelings of education antimattering spurred the Walkout as discussed in Chapter IV, participants gained psychological benefits of "mattering" in representing their profession and students. The diverse community connections further affirmed them as well, as discussed in Chapter V. In this chapter, I will address mattering/antimattering (Flett, 2018) components surrounding the Walkout. These components highlight the psychological impact of the culture of austerity in Oklahoma and the lack of legislative action as expressions of antimattering. In turn, this speaks to the psychological affirmation of all children, and all educators, mattering. When Oklahoma's educators walked out, they used their collective action to make visible to the legislature and community that education matters to all.

Teacher Labor Matters

Initially, there was uncertainty about whether or not the public would support the Walkout. Over the course of several years, two state questions that would have provided more funding for salaries and classrooms were soundly defeated leaving educators feeling as though their work did not matter. April stated, "what started for me as a teacher was when the penny tax didn't pass. That was heartbreaking for me because I felt as though the entire state of Oklahoma set us back." One even asked, "Does Oklahoma just hate teachers?" However, as evidenced in the expanding sense of "we/community" of Chapter V, the sense of camaraderie and connection among diverse communities functioned as a way of affirming teacher value for at least that short time.

For example, the Tulsa teachers' union decided (with administrative support) to have teachers work their contract three weeks prior to the Walkout. When a union engages in this strategy, it is to make public and visible the work done outside of contract time by adhering only to contract hours. Patti, TCTA President explained "you meet outside, and you walk in together and then at the end of the day...at contract time...you meet, and you leave." By adhering to only their contract hours, educators make visible (through absence) the amount of work they do before and after their contract day. For example, clubs and activities sponsored after school would not occur because those activities occur outside the normal hours of the school day. Tulsa Public Schools supported TCTA's action to make visible unpaid labor. Patti emphasized, "[Teachers] will never get their work done, if they don't do it for free." From this pre-Walkout action, educators gained support from the community by withholding their unpaid labor. The community support also conveyed to educators that their labor mattered.

Flett (2018) discusses varied acts that symbolize mattering such as "expressing gratitude as a form of appreciation" (p. 35). Many participants viewed aspects of the community support as forms of appreciation for teacher labor. Although the Walkout was intended as protest and visibility, the community support was a vital experiential component of the nine-day action. Jennie reflected on how she would leave the less-than supportive environment inside the Capitol and stand on the bridge with her sign so she could hear the passing vehicles honk in support. She said,

> regardless of how I felt kinda silenced by the lawmakers, I felt the community really, really rallied. Had the community and the state not rallied in support of us, I may not be a teacher anymore. … Regardless of what happened with the legislature, I needed the community to stay.

Community support nourished a sense of importance, attention, and appreciation (Flett, 2018) for some narrators aligned with the psychology of mattering. In fact, according to Blanc (2019), "polls found that 72 percent of the state" supported the Walkout (p. 80).

Quality Education Matters

Teachers narrated their roles as champions of education, seeking affirmation through their Walkout representation, and of the importance of quality education for children. The affirmation that children's education matters in turn has a psychological effect on affirming to educators that their daily lives and work matter. When the teacher pay raise passed before the Walkout, the state's legislature was fairly confident educators and stakeholders would attend for one-day to show their appreciation. The legislature did not consider the rage and frustration felt from years of oppression which built, in Flett's (2018) terms, the sense of antimattering. Educators acknowledged the pay increase before

the Walkout. However, they took the mantle further when they walked and demanded more classroom funding in order to improve the quality of education for students. This act underscored that legislative antimattering was not directed just at educators but education as a profession and students as the future.

Walkout participants sought a stronger message of affirmation for students and education. As Carrie stated, “We weren’t there to say thank you. We were there to hold you (legislators) accountable for our children...our future.” This comment emerged in response to Governor Fallin’s demand that teachers thank her and the legislators for the teacher raise. Jeffery also found insulting that educators were expected “to be grateful that they (legislators) were begrudgingly doing something” for teachers, when in fact, the gesture was insufficient because education still needed proper funding. Cathy compared the pay raise legislation as a “drop in the bucket” in terms of student needs. She even explained this to her students, “We were not at the Capitol to say thank you to the legislators for their meager attempt to keep us in the classroom.” Kevin also shared the Governor Fallin quote with his students and said, “how do I say thank you while saying thanks, but 400-500 million dollars still isn’t enough, so we’re still coming”?

Several participants commented on the importance of securing education funding in order to improve the quality of Oklahoma’s education system. Cathy felt legislators were essentially robbing students of a quality education. Other visual representations during the Walkout underscored this message. One representation was the student holding her tattered textbook in a photo that went viral.

(*Figure 12, Photo Prompt: Tattered Texts, Doug Folks, OEA staff, 2018*)

Alicia equated this visual to her own daughter's textbook that was missing coverage of the last two presidents of the United States. Jennie also noted the significance of such an image when she said, "she brought her own book to show just how many of our supplies were lacking … the textbooks are a powerful symbol in the community." Tattered textbooks signal that our children don't matter enough.

Educators' absence from the classroom aligns with Flett's (2018) concepts of dependence and noted absence in the psychology of mattering (p. 31). Flett (2018) describes dependence as a "feeling of being important because others are relying on you" (p. 32). Noted absence is defined as a 'feeling that someone misses you' (Flett, 2018, p. 32). Educators forced the public to pay attention through their classroom absence. There is a long history of teacher blame and deprofessionalizing in the United States that results in devaluing of teachers and public education which I discuss later in this chapter (D'Amico-Pawlewicz, 2020). Too often in recent years, society and legislative bodies

expect educators to be readily available and responding to steady reforms and demands for a variety of social problems (D'Amico Pawlewicz, 2020). Yet this focus on individuals/groups of educators distracts from the continued austerity and policy decisions that strip the education system of structural support that allows educators to do their jobs, and in turn, testify that educators as individuals and as a profession, matter.

Currently, the eruption of the COVID-19 and the start of the 20-21 school year has caused a resurgence in society's awareness of our dependency on the education system. For example, as school districts across Oklahoma grappled with new learning environments in light of the pandemic, several parent groups surfaced insisting schools continue to open with the traditional face-to-face format. For many, the argument to return to the traditional format highlighted the parents' inability to obtain or afford childcare if schools were not open. Rather than portraying educators as professionals, this rhetoric portrays them as childcare providers and as essential contributors to the economic stability of the country. The social dismissal of teachers' value continues.

Affirming Mattering Through Activism

Activism among educators, students, and stakeholders functioned to reinforce the value of the project of education to which they had dedicated their professional lives. It is interesting to note that most of the narrators did not use the words "activist" and/or "advocate" when describing themselves. However, Claudia noted that "teachers should be natural advocates because what is advocacy but making relationships? … It's making relationships even when they have lots of differences." Yet, narrators freely used the terms of activism and advocacy when referring to children and the students who attended or supported the Walkout. Narrators acknowledged the value of including their families,

their parents and students, which allowed the Walkout experience to be a learning process of civil discourse for issues that matter on a societal level. Participants viewed the next generation as vital for doing better and achieving more. According to Flett (2018), the willingness of teachers and stakeholders "to engage in acts that promote the wellbeing of younger generations" (p.36) was one way to convey that teacher activism matters to the future of education.

The Walkout attendance of students and their parents also signaled to teachers that their cause and contributions mattered. Carrie stated that "I saw parents...bringing in their kids and it's like...my teacher, my classroom...hey, this is it. People are seeing the importance of education." Susanna also felt "the parents of our schools were really encouraging" which bolstered her feelings of being valued. Narrators valued students and families' participation, in part because it offered hope for the future of education and collective action, extending the reach of educators' social contributions. Cathy spoke about seeing parents and grandparents arrive with students during the nearly two-week event and that it was important for them "to be involved and engaged members of society." Jeffrey expressed his appreciation of seeing "the students taking action...taking ownership." He emphasized, "they do things that are just aware, intelligent, responsible and you go - *Damn*, you did better than I could." Cal also commented on how "students were lobbying for their own interests" and Cheila believed "teachers had done their job because the students were doing and the parents, too, were supporting." This support evoked strong emotion; Cheila started crying when she said, "The kids - the students that stood up for their teachers and for themselves and the parents that showed up (quiet voice, still crying) That was important to me."

Kevin, who conducted an outdoor classroom for his AP English students on the Capitol grounds, stated, “those are all my kiddos and so watching them get empowered and become the student voice and the face of the student voice was pretty amazing.” Jennie thought the students’ presence might signal a long-term investment in public education: “just gives me hope that the next generation is going to continue to fight for education, for children, for families.” Matt, an AP US History and Government teacher, emphasized the value of student attendance:

> the young people that were out there that were advocating... that are not afraid to express their opinions and have their voices heard. … that has been my work for 20 years...is to get the students engaged in the process, to understand the process, and to then recognize where there is a problem and do something to address that problem.

Through shared activism, the message of education mattering was made visible to the public. For narrators, student presence and learning affirmed the possible long-lasting effects of teachers’ work on youth who represent the future of public education. This represents ego extension of mattering where, for example, educators realized that students were invested in teachers along with what was happening at the Walkout and recognized that the Walkout impacted their education futures (Flett, 2018, p. 32).

The Antimattering

In this section, I discuss antimattering (Flett, 2018) in relation to educators and interaction with and perception of the legislature, OEA, and in a broader context society. For decades, educators have dealt with societal rhetoric fed by neoliberal education reform that places blame on teachers. Low test scores? It is the teachers’ fault. Lack of

curriculum? Blame teachers (D'Amico-Pawlewicz, 2020). Not enough resources? Teachers can buy their own or make do. This deprofessionalizing rhetoric has explicitly and systematically whittled away feelings of teachers' value and agency. Neoliberalism as a system of thinking creates the perception and the effect that the education system is failing. This perception justifies the neoliberal education reform movements seeking privatization. Neoliberal-infused policies and practices fuels this criticism through a message of education/educator antimattering.

Most participants commented on limited support at the legislative level, which I discussed in Chapter II and IV. In fact, the majority echoed the feeling of not being regarded as significant or important as a collective "we," a group that matters, when discussing the culture of extreme austerity and punitive legislative acts over the years (Flett, 2018). Cal noted that when he was in the classroom, problems "always came back to not enough money. Not enough resources. Not enough funds." He then made the connection that "all resources, everything to do with public education comes down to legislation." Letitia also remarked "hey, we're tired of this. We are tired of not getting the funding we deserve for kids. It's been ten years. It's time." Carrie discussed how Oklahoma had been at the bottom since her days of student teaching and described politics as the reason. For these participants, it was apparent the education did not matter to the legislative body. In Flett's terms this is "antimattering."

Matt's comments reflect the connections between legislators' decisions and classroom struggles when he said,

> Well, the events go back ten years. This has been a build-up. I don't know that it has been a slow build-up but it's been very rapid - a lot of different things added

> on top of each other … From all of the cuts that the state has made to education funding to the impact of our local school districts where we've eliminated positions left and right for years and we've seen class sizes then go up and teachers feel that frustration of that - Why are my classes so large? How do you expect me to do the job I'm supposed to do with so many kids in here? - And the response has been - Well, you know … funding … And so, over about a ten year period, it has reached a point of frustration where we've had numerous election where we've tried to get the best candidates elected that will make education a priority and the state has chosen to maintain the status quo for the last ten years and continue the cuts which has made our jobs much more difficult. So, this was the year. The deadline. This is it. The line was drawn in the sand. We need action now. If you are going to take the action, we are prepared to take the action.

In this segment of Matt's narrative, he addresses feeling as though the legislative body did not see the importance of funding education nor did the legislature notice what was happening within his classroom due to continued cuts. Although there is a dependence on him as an educator, it comes without the appreciation for the profession and acknowledgement of the effects of these legislative decisions on his profession. Regardless of the legislative explanation, the decisions felt like assaults on teacher value.

Several other participants shared Matt's sentiments that reflect their feelings of "antimattering." Cathy stated,

> The 10-13 years of continually asking the classroom teachers to do more in the classroom through more students, more subject material, more testing...with less. Less supplies - less money available - less textbooks - mean, absolutely doing

more with less. It hit a blockade...we weren't being heard or weren't being taken seriously.

Cathy articulated her feelings of antimattering in relation to not being treated as a professional worthy of dignity and respect, as valued. She said,

> We truly were the professionals with the degree and the license and the professional development upkeep for being at the top of our game. Why weren't we being consulted where legislation was considered? Where funding could have been done? It just felt like there was a disconnect between the legislation and the career … and if they were going to make laws about oil and gas, they consult with oil and gas - if they are going to make laws about criminal justice, they speak to lawyers and police officers. So why wasn't education being consulted?

Alicia emphasized legislators' "overall lack of treating educators as professionals." She went on to express her concerns regarding legislation and teacher certification when she said,

> We go to college. You have to maintain a certain grade point to get into certain colleges of education. It seemed like many of our elected officials were cutting back on even professional requirements to become a teacher by allowing anyone to take a test and become a teacher without any knowledge.

Alicia underscores legislative deprofessionalization in Oklahoma. For years, the legislature passed legislation focused on lessening certification requirements while increasing evaluation protocols. As education funding cuts continued, school districts began decreasing professional development opportunities for teachers. Flett (2018) contends that the mattering component, appreciation, is present when there are feelings of

one's "actions are of value and matter to someone else" (p. 32). The legislature conveyed antimattering as it continually worked to deskill and deprofessionalize educators.

Others spoke about the one-day rallies, failed stated questions, and the 2016 educator-candidates who ran for public office as efforts to be seen and to be heard, and to hear affirmations of teacher value through concrete actions and policies. Kevin attributed these attempts as the "culmination of educators more and more understanding the role that politicians were playing in their day-to-day reality." This connection, your dismissive decisions and my daily labor, "created a sense of awareness that simply hadn't existed in the previous ten years…."

Part of that awareness occurred when several participants attended special legislative sessions in the hopes of passing education funding. Carrie reflected about sitting in the gallery while the Step Up Plan was being presented in February 2018. With marked emotion, she said, "That was one of the most disheartening - our state representatives got up and spoke so poorly of education and teachers." Katie also attended the special legislative sessions, stating, "Once you go and see it and you see the way that some of the legislators...they don't respect you." Cheila also said, "I went down, and I visited with the law makers … and I was kinda unhappy with the response I got from them." These interactions brought fresh awareness of devaluing.

During the course of the Walkout most legislators communicated verbally and non-verbally that the educator presence at the Capitol was neither warranted nor wanted; these attitudes further angered participants. Denise and Kandee both shared the same thoughts that the legislators believed they could 'wait out' the participants who would get tired and leave. Therefore, they spent little time interacting or visiting with protestors. As

crowds grew outside, and especially inside, the Capitol, the accessibility of legislators decreased. Katie noticed "our lawmakers started shutting their doors and you'd have to knock to get in." Linda R felt "it made sense for legislators to avoid us...to not see us...to step out and say ugly things, ugly comments." Carrie spoke about being able to see some of her legislators but commented, "some were not so friendly, some just turned and walked away." In Flett's (2018) work, "failing to acknowledge someone's presence" (p. 40) is one method of indicating dismissal. Also, by ignoring or not interacting with teachers, legislators also failed to discover their concerns which is another way of conveying antimattering (Flett, 2018, p. 40). For Jennie, visiting with her legislator was demoralizing. She described meeting with him and a group of her colleagues:

> So even though we had done all of our research and figures from the department of education, he told us that all the numbers were skewed, and we didn't know what we were talking about. I believe, in fact, he said something like - You guys are so cute...so funny. You all come with the same OEA facts and you just spout them off because you don't do your own research - So even coming prepared, we were insulted.

Flett's (2018) work discusses varied ways one can convey to others, whether groups or individuals, that they do not matter (p. 40). Walkout participants' often spoke of not being heard by legislators, feeling ignored, or demeaned. These perceptions of antimattering reflect Flett's terms (2018) when he states, "someone who feels like she or he doesn't matter is that they have encountered people who have minimized, denied, invalidated, or ignored their feelings and emotional experiences" (p. 40). According to Flett (2018), "people also come to feel like they have no voice because people either fail

to listen to them or have a tendency to interrupt them or quickly make themselves the focus of the conversation" (p.41). Some narrators even noted that legislative prioritizing of the oil and gas industry over public education made it appear education, and those who deliver it, and the students who attend public education, are simply less deserving of state resources. The message is: find a way to do the work but we won't help you do it.

While Flett (2018) focuses on individual connections to mattering/antimattering, he argues there is a "need for additional research on the association between mattering and sense of community" (p.273). I agree with this statement based on the findings within this chapter. Unfolding from teacher accounts was a sense of collective mattering/antimattering. This idea emerges in the expansion of community (Chapter V) and takes shape as the collective antimattering formed with the legislative/education relationship discussed here. In the face of antimattering, varied forms of community were fostered through nine-days of assembly at the Capitol. Carrie stated that after the first week, "we were just getting doors shut in our faces and they'd tell us we need to get back in the classroom and quit being selfish…. We're not going to stop." Jennie, however, realized there was a point where the action had to move away from the Capitol. She said,

> I had a moment of clarity where I knew that they would let us stay out until June and they would not care. They were going to let us stay on strike and let the public turn against us and not give us what we wanted.

Several noted that the Walkout, though having an abrupt ending, had run its course. Most discussed their hope of electing pro-public education candidates. In fact, Jennie decided to file for office along with 500 other pro-public education candidates. Carrie said that she believed legislators thought educators would go back to their classrooms but because

of the actions and inaction of the legislature, “many teachers around the state signed up to run for political office.” Matt saw the Walkout’s end as a chance to “support those pro-public education candidates to make sure...education is a priority every single year.” Kevin attributed the Walkout “to an almost 30%...25% bump in voter participation rates in the mid-term election” for 2018. He further added, “I would imagine a decent part of the general populace has paid attention to politics more in the last six months.”

According to Butler (2015), the act of assembly is an embodied and representative action. As teachers and stakeholders gathered en masse, they represented students’ needs. They represented the needs of real bodies who face hunger and weariness in relation to their profession. Butler states:

> it is *this* body, and *these* bodies, that require employment, shelter, health care, and food, as well as a sense of future that is not the future of unpayable debt; it is *this* body, or *these* bodies, or bodies *like* this body or these bodies, that live the condition of an imperiled livelihood, decimated infrastructure, and accelerating precarity (pp. 9-10).

By creating their collective voice, even for 9 intense days, educators affirmed that education and its future held importance and value to the students, parents, and other stakeholders who gathered in support of the Walkout. As Cari stated,

> The walkout was...a teacher movement. It was an educator movement, but it was so much more than that. It was people really putting validity to the work that we were doing because we care about students and the message was the right message. We’re doing this for our kids. Whether or not the legislators heard that message.

This is made evident by the student-centered and education-centered data that emerged from the narratives. In fact, teacher labor and teacher pay raises were not central to the Walkout. Rather, focus was on the students and education overall.

CHAPTER VII

NARRATIVES & REFLECTIONS OF "THE BOY" & "THE TURTLES"

(Figure 13, 110-Mile March, Aaron Baker, march participant, 2018)

In findings Chapters IV, V, and VI, I discussed the emotional and corporeal components of teacher voice, varied forms of community, and the concept of mattering that emerged from the narratives. In the end, the Walkout was a testimony to the need for respect, as Blanc (2019) claims is true of most labor stoppages (p. 24). In this chapter, I share two extended stories which weave the themes throughout the narrators' personal accounts of the lived experiences of the Walkout. To honor the spirit of oral history to preserve and highlight the voices of people as actors in the events of history (Perks &

Thompson, 2016), I provide the full, retelling of each story. In the process, this work enriches one's understanding of the themes.

The Boy

I first interviewed Denise in April 2019, in her middle school classroom in Tulsa, Oklahoma. It was my first time to meet her and although she had eagerly agreed to participate in my research, she was slow to relax and share her experience. After transcribing and initially analyzing her account, I realized I needed to conduct an additional interview for clarification, so I contacted Denise in the spring of 2020 and requested a follow-up interview. At the time of the second interview, Oklahoma was in the midst of the state shutdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and we shared several humorous text message exchanges promising neither one of use would be "dressed up" for the video-call conversation. As Denise and I worked through clarifying points from her first interview, she chattered openly about the Walkout as she puttered around her house even taking me into her garage so I could see the Walkout sign she kept. As a closing piece, I asked Denise to share with me any other memories or thoughts she had about the Walkout and for the first time since our conversation had started, she stopped and intently looked at me through my computer screen and said,

> When the little kid got lost. That was the first day. The kid got lost and there were thousands of people and everybody just crouched down so they could look and see for this kid (showing emotion) and so, it was metaphorical for what we do every day. So representative and we just got it done. I mean they found him immediately. If you think of yourself as a parent, that's your worst nightmare to lose your kid in a crowd. And they were able to get everybody to crouch without

even being asked twice, you know, they just did it. Can you imagine right now going out and asking a group to do something? They would just look at you be like – You can't tell me what to do – (laughter)

[*So why do you think that was the response from the crowd to crouch down*]

Why do I think? Well, it's just what we do every day, you know, we just do what we have to for the kids.

[So, I'm going to ask you to clarify one last thing. You talked about the little boy that was lost and everyone crouching down]

Yes

[*You said that was metaphorical … I just want you to give me a little more information about what you meant by that being metaphorical in that experienc*e]. Well, because we're, as educators, expected to just drop everything and make something happen and it's always for the benefit of the kids. All the time we're given no notification for something and we just react. And we have a massive number of people that we're in charge of and somehow because we have to make it happen, we just at the drop of a hat - we just say – 'Alright, I need everybody to' – and we just do it and then it happens. When it happened at such a level that nobody questioned it. They just did it and everybody worked together as a team to find this kid that was lost. You know, in the sea of people (emotional) [*yeah*] and he was probably oblivious that he was lost but (laughter) his mom wasn't [*yeah*] because she got on the microphone at first calling, describing him, which was heart wrenching [*yea*h]. And that's when somebody said – Let's all just crouch down – and everybody all crouched and it just got silent. It was real sweet.

[*Yeah and they were able to find him fairly quickly. Correct?*]

Yeah, it just the time. Cause mom, she was on the stage. So they located him and there were officers everywhere and they were so nice.

As Denise told this story, her voice softened, and she displayed marked emotions with hesitancy in her voice and sometimes spoke through tears. After nearly two years, she was still visibly moved by the assembly of Walkout participants--educators--working in unity to locate the lost boy within minutes of his mother's public pleas from the stage. The embodied act of the assembly kneeling so the child would become visible shows how "bodies or embodied selves are highly interwoven with the presence and actions of others' bodies" (Ellingson, 2017, p. 22). Denise noticed the crowd did not question or debate as to "why" they were kneeling but rather the crowd came to understand the meaning of the act through the "doing." As a result, the child was quickly found. The kneeling act became a "knowing" through "doing" (Ellingson, 2017).

The enactment of community, a "we," is also inferred through this story as Denise refers to the "mother" who was looking for her lost "child." Denise was able to share the fear of losing a child as the mother took to the Walkout stage and described her son to the crowd. Denise also spoke about the help and support of the police officers who converged on that area of the crowd once the radio call came in about a lost child. She also equated the event to that of being a teacher by including the plural pronoun usage of the word, we.

When Denise refers to educators being "expected to just drop everything and make something happen," she may be referring to the endless educational reforms and mandates that affect what teachers do in their classrooms; somehow, they are always

expected to simply respond and make things happen. The statement also implies that those outside of education do not pay attention or appreciate what teachers do within their classrooms and therefore do not seek educator input on how mandates impact their day-to-day professional life. To Denise, the mass moment in which the crowd responded to the missing child echoes what teachers do in classrooms every day.

Finally, Denise speaks to the mattering component of "ego extension" which is the recognition that others are emotionally invested in the events affecting you (Flett, 2018, p. 32). Educators express a strong ego extension for their students and several participants spoke about the Walkout being "for the kids" or referred to their profession with student-centered comments. Students displayed ego extension for their teachers by attending and supporting the Walkout while educators showed the same for their students. Denise stated, "it's just what we do every day, you know, we just do what we have to for the kids." In essence, Denise is stating that because education and students' matter, educators are willing to do whatever is needed -- even if for one lost child.

The Turtles

Susanna, a special education teacher, warmly invited me into her shared elementary portable classroom in Tulsa, Oklahoma on the one-year anniversary of the Walkout. We sat at her teacher table across from each other -- she in her teacher chair and I in a student chair. While I precariously perched my adult self onto the child-sized chair, I had a moment of missing my own teacher table from the many years I spent teaching before taking my OEA role. Until that day, I had not met Susanna. Immediately, she welcomed me and shared her experiences with joy. The conversation flowed easily, and she was kind enough to offer me a bottle of water in the midst of my

coughing fit without ever missing a beat of her story. Susanna was a part of the Tulsa teachers 110-mile walk from Tulsa to the Oklahoma City Capitol. She volunteered to work the logistics by driving her car that she called the "sag wagon." The sag wagon offered walkers an opportunity to either take a break or ride to the next stop if they could not walk there by the intended arrival time. She shared the bulk of the story mid-way through the interview and spoke with a veiled sense of pride about her role in the march. She said,

> So, with the walk, what it was like? It was fun because we had - there were three different groups of people. There were the turtles who were the slowest [*okay*] (laughter) and then there were in the middle, the ones (pause) but [I] can't remember now. The fastest ones were the foxes. They were the people who walk every day. Who do marathons, yada yada. So, they could in a way everyone pretty much broke up into three groups. So the turtles got further and further behind and dropped out as we went along. In the very end, there were like five turtles left of the whole hundred miles. It was unbelievable. [One participating administrator] is in terrific shape but she walked in the middle group so she could talk on the phone and text at the same time and not have to focus on keeping up with the other group.
>
> And so, I was assigned the turtles. I kept in touch with the turtles because they would do pretty well and then suddenly, just suddenly, would fall apart and there were parts on our trip where there was a long, too long a stretch without a bathroom. It wasn't so much that they were getting too tired. It would be because they would desperately need the bathroom. So I would, and some of them were

fine going behind the bushes but there weren't always bushes on the road (laughter) like it was pulling down your pants on the highway (laughter). So I would get a couple in my car. I could take three other people [in] my car and then I would drive ahead to the nearest bathroom, which is usually within two or three miles and somewhere. And then they would go to the bathroom and then I would drive them back to join their group in the walk.

So, they were only missing out, you know, not very many steps. And then there was one or two times that they, that [one participating administrator] flagged me down because she just had to focus on what she was saying on the phone. So, she would just get into my car and I was keeping pace with the walkers so that she would finish her phone call conversation and then get back out and join the walkers. She didn't do that very often.

And I had water in the back and there was always places we'd stop to open my back and there was water and food and everything for them.

Their bedtime was like ten o'clock! (laughter) And I was like, I don't ever stay up until 10 o'clock! You know, 7:30 is my bedtime. Maybe 8 o'clock, so (laughter). There was a bunch of young kids kind of hooping (referencing being loud) and they need to keep it there, so it was like, no, never mind. So every night after everyone had been dropped off, I would drive back home. And then the next morning, I would try to leave early enough so I could be there wherever they were at, 7:30 in the morning or in the morning to take off with them. And what also happened is that – let's say on day three – someone walked. There were some people that joined us along the way. So, they would join us on day three and at the

end of day three, they would need a ride back to their car where they started. Or if they started with day one and then they just pooped out totally on day four. So, at the end of the day, I would bring them back to their car where it had been parked and in the next morning.

And so by the end of the trip, I was, my very last day, I didn't get home until 11:30 at night and I needed to be there at, like, 5 o'clock in the morning, because we were starting out extra early because we were still trying to get to the Capitol by noon. But most of our destinations had been for 5:00 or 5:30. And suddenly we're trying to make all the deadlines we needed to do.

The last part, which is as long as the other ones, we needed to be there by noon. So, we did that. It was pretty good! It was - it was (slight hesitation as she answered) I'm glad I had the experience, but I don't know if I would do it again. Like if we walk now, I wouldn't be a sag wagon. What happened for me was that it was one or the other. Either I had people who just thought - was so thankful for what I was doing. Thought it was the cat's meow and it was really fun making new friends. And I've stayed in touch with some of them. But then some of the organizers were really cranky and I forget what it was now, but I would sometimes ask them like – What time would you like me to be here now? - Or I'm trying to communicate with them that I need to stop for my own break or so-and-so. and they wouldn't respond to me or they'd be like really standoffish. And I didn't take it personally because they were like that to everyone, but these were some major organizers (*yeah*). I just felt like I wasn't a cool enough person (slight emotional turn to her voice followed by laughter).

I wasn't looking for a lot but there was a lot of put downs and we were all trying to coordinate with each other with another Group Me. Not, it was not Group Me. It was 360 [*okay*]. Which is an app that shows you where you are in relation to everyone else [*Oh, cool, okay*] So once in a while the directions, I wasn't sure how to get from me to the other person or we lost and we needed…Internet and there were places where there's no Internet. So, I couldn't see where I was exactly in relation to them and we're just asking. And they were just like I was an idiot, but I wasn't the only one at all. I found that from other people that they felt the same way. So, I didn't have to take it personally, but I thought – Wow! What are these people doing?

And then, – what kind of bothered me – there were some people who were so nice, but they only walked the first three days. And then they joined us at the very end. When we got toward the end, [one of the organizers] and their crew, the OEA people, were trying to get take orders for T-shirts for people who did this. Who did the whole walk [*yeah*] and okay, if they didn't do enough, like they took a two-hour break, or they cut it short couple of hours one day; no big deal! But then we suddenly get these people that we know were only there for, like, the first three days and they came up and were – No – insisting they been there the whole [time] and they wanted their shirts. And they were ready to get really ugly about it. So, we were like – Fine. Whatever. Get your shirt. So, I guess there is like that in everything, you know, [*yeah*]. There's the people that just try to hone in on that kind of weird thing but it wasn't just two or three; it was like twenty.

Yes, I did. I walked in with them. I parked my car and walked in with them to the Capitol. And it was great. We had a great reception. There was a band. There was high school bands playing and also, all the schools we went to.

The high schools [*yeah*]. They knocked themselves out to try to make as comfortable as possible with all of their mats for us to sleep on, for the kids to sleep on. And all the way along, there were people. Different people doing food [*yeah*] and so anyway…when we got there [*yeah*], it was great. It was very exciting. There's a lot of electricity. Electric feeling in the air.

Well, I thought the walkout was a great success. There were so many people. I mean, I think we started out with 156 or something and we ended up with at least 50 that has done the whole thing [*wow*]. All the foxes made it and that's another thing, there was a marathon runner who is a doctor from Oklahoma City who followed us the whole way. And so, there were some people who were going to walk no matter how blistered and sore their feet were. And so, he was a doctor. So what we all agreed on was that when he said you have to stop, you have to stop. He let a lot of them continue further on but when it really got to [the] point where they ended it themselves, they stopped. So that was good.

But basically, I thought the walk was a great success because so many people made it. We had so much support all along the way. We didn't have enough bathrooms. The people did come out of the house and gave us some water and everything. We were waiting again. We got a lot of cheering on – the churches – all the schools. Everyone and we just felt like we had support of the entire state of Oklahoma. And so, when we got there, we just felt really good.

> Now when we actually got to the Capitol, after we had our hoorah. Here we are! They, like, shuffled us, funneled us all off to a nearby place that I forget what it was now but is like lawyers building [*okay*]. And they had like five or six people from the legislature who supported education there to greet us and to thank us because there was so much negativity inside the Capitol coming from the legislature that they didn't want us to get through this and a legislator says – Well, fuck you – you know, you idiots, all you did was make your feet sore. So they immediately shuffled us off to this area with delicious food and then each of them – the candidates -- could talk about it. And we could all sit and rest and relax and rest our feet and get food and drink and you know, congratulate each other and really celebrate what we had done [*righ*t].
>
> You know someone was really brilliant that they did that because there was just so much mounting opposition against us from the Capitol. So we all felt really appreciated and we're all really glad we've done it but I was at that point, I was really exhausted. And so, for the next two days, I went home and for the next, oh, I guess I made it for the next day and a half, I slept like all night and all day.

Susanna's detailed oral account captures diverse dimensions of the walkout: educators' protesting and participating in the ways they could; acts of dismissal and appreciation; internal divisions of community; the desire for those who did not fully participate to have external markers claiming their participation in the historical Walkout. She moved onto another topic in her interview and toward the end, I asked her to share any particular moment or memory from the Walkout. She immediately circled back to her interaction with the Turtle Walkers and displayed a lot of emotion when she shared,

I think it was (pause as she begins to cry) the turtle teachers which just started out. They didn't get the doctor to us before they started walking. So, the very first day they had (long pause) They didn't do the right thing with those shoes and they had like dollar-sized blisters on their feet. And they just kept going (still emotional as she is talking) and the doctor just bandaged them up and they were just walking on blisters. They walked another 80 miles on their feet and so they (hesitation) they were the ones. Some of the middle walkers and the long-distance walkers would just like drop out on their own. And the turtles wouldn't stop until the doctor told them that they had to stop. They were crying because they had to stop. They were about to lose the use of their toes or their feet or something like that.

So that (paused still in tears) that really stays with me. That was the biggest thing and that I can be a part of supporting them so that they could make it through another 80 miles [*yeah*] unless there is - you know, the first part of the walk was supposed to be 12 miles and it was more like 21 [*yeah, wow*]. They measured it wrong [*oh, no*]. And so it was huge, a huge walk that very first day. So, it just took out everything out of everyone the very first day. And they all, of course, just wanted to keep going but it would've been a lot better if we had the doctor before - a week before the walk.

The doctor said – This is how you take care of your feet and what you do, you bandage them. I mean it's a really elaborate thing. You use bandages. You had to put in like Vaseline on your feet and then you wrap and like duct tape and then you put more Vaseline. And more tape and so that keeps somehow the friction

> and everything. And he was also looking at their shoes and made them go out after that first day. That was part of what I did with the car. I transferred them to Payless shoe stores that was close by in Sapulpa so that they could buy new shoes, the correct shoes. That should have been done a week before. And then there was really something wrong with it. They, just for some reason, just didn't think it was 21 miles, but we figured it out. We're like (laughter) [*this is a long 12 miles*]. So one being 21 miles. That's too much the first day and so that wacked out everyone's legs. So, they all - it was so really hard. Much harder than people even knew.

As Susanna shared the story about her participation in the 110-mile Tulsa march, elements of the three themes emerged, including the bodily experiences of teacher voice, a sense of belonging and community as part of a dedicated "we" who participated, and the importance of mattering to others and to the public. First, Susanna highlighted embodied components of participation by tending to hers and walkers' needs. Susanna drove home each evening because her bedtime did not match that of the walkers and she realized she needed to care for her body in order to care for the walkers. She also made sure she was up and ready each morning to meet the walkers along the route and to tend to their needs for food, water, bathroom breaks, or short respites from walking. She also addressed the physical exhaustion that was experienced at the march's end when she commented that she went home and slept for over a day.

Susanna also vividly described the physicality of the march by sharing about the lack of bathrooms, proper footwear, and the conditions of people's bodies -- especially their feet, during the course of the seven-day march. It should also be noted that Susanna

discussed at length the importance of the doctor who cared for the participants, and their feet during the course of the march. Also, the walkers were informally placed in three ability groups based on their fitness levels to maintain the stamina needed to complete 10 or more miles per day in order to reach the state's Capitol.

Second, the expansion of a sense of "we," of community, was evidenced within Susanna's recount of the 110-march. Although she did not physically do the walking until the last day when they arrived at the Capitol, she felt a sense of community among her fellow educators as they embarked on the march. There was also a sense of "we" when Susanna talked about a Tulsa school leader taking part daily in the march and feeling that having her involved was a unifying message. The Walkout and the 110-mile Tulsa March represented education stakeholders coming together as advocates. The sense of the "we" included community members and like-minded individuals who offered displays of support throughout the seven-day march. As noted in Chapters IV and VI, this is evidenced by the various forms of support from organizations across the state and people who came out of their homes to cheer on the walkers and offer water and support. Susanna also spoke of the churches and schools offering support such as meals and lodging. These actions gave Susanna a feeling as though it was the entire state of Oklahoma supporting the 110-mile Tulsa march.

Elements of Flett's (2018) conceptualizing of mattering also emerge throughout Susanna's story. On a personal level, she at times felt the walkers did not fully appreciate her participation. Yet, she felt her role was important and, that, perhaps, walkers did not pay sufficient attention to her efforts. To Flett (2018), "appreciation" conveys that one matters to others. Although Susanna's choice of participation was through "less visible

networks of solidarity" (Butler, 2015, p. 135) than, for example, daily protesting at the Capitol or walking throughout the march, but her participation remained significant to the march's success. She also addressed feelings of "antimattering" when legislators ignored the group and they were taken to another building for food and rest. At this separate location, hand-picked, supportive legislators attended because they did not want the walkers to experience the negativity taking place within the Capitol building. Those who organized this reception of sorts wanted the march participants to feel as though their significant efforts mattered. That their march mattered was also evidenced by the displays of community support for the walkers through the offerings of water, food, places of rest, and crowds gathering to cheer them as they walked to the Capitol.

Susanna's final elements of her narrative also evidence the three themes key to my oral history research. Throughout the interview, Susanna was animated and talkative with occasional moments of laughter. However, her emotional reflection at the end spoke not only to the 110-mile Tulsa March, but symbolically spoke to educators as a collective. As Susanna recounted her admiration of the Turtle walkers enduring the physical pain and trauma of walking unprepared on the first day, she was overcome with emotion. She acknowledged that the organizers could have better prepared to assist the walkers for the extended miles the first day. Also, despite the pain and weariness, the Turtle walkers continued, and she was happy to support them. In fact, Susanna stated that the Turtle walkers would not stop until the advising doctor told them that they had to quit and even then, "they were crying because they had to stop."

The themes of embodiment, sense of belonging to a "we," and mattering weave throughout these oral accounts. They also symbolize the conditions teachers face within

education. Prior to the Walkout, Oklahoma educators had faced years of teacher blame (D'Amico, 2020) as had all educators nationally. In their state, they also experienced stressful and tiring conditions from a culture of austerity (blistered feet, weary legs) and yet, they continued to stay steadfast, try to support each other, and act in the best interests of their students (enduring 80 more miles to finish) through collective action. The Capitol building was the physical and symbolic target of the march. Susanna ended her story referencing the 110-mile Tulsa March and alluding to education as well when she said, "it was so really hard...much harder than people even know"

CHAPTER VIII

POSITIONALITY: PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE WALKOUT

(*Figure 14, Right Shoes on the Wrong Day, Rhonda Harlow, 2018*)

Ellingson (2017) addresses researcher and participant intersubjectivity as the "common ground" in which the two meet (p. 21). The shared dynamics between oral narrator and listener is a recognized component of oral history as well. Throughout the research process, I engaged in reflexivity on my layered positionality. As a teacher-advocate-researcher-participant-OEA employee in the Walkout, I knew my experiences would overlap with and differ from participants. Accordingly, narrators' accounts sometimes evoked strong emotion for me. Because of these layers of my positionality, I do believe some participants shared a sense of a safe space to safely work through their

reflective stories. In this section, I discuss my positionality followed with personal narratives of events from my perspective shortly before the Walkout.

Layers of Identification with Participants

First, I identified with the participants' roles as parents. Most narrators identified as a parent and/or grandparent. They felt a sense of pride and accomplishment related to their child's involvement in their rights to assemble. As a parent, I identify directly with the feelings they shared. Also, as a parent, I listened closely to Matt's narrative since he had been the high school U.S. History and Government teacher for both of my boys. Although not a parent himself, he used the language "my kids" and "my students" when discussing students' involvement. I appreciated his teaching care and detail and his commitment to support students to become politically engaged and active.

Another connection was our identities as educators. All narrators were active current teachers or had been in the classroom at some point in their professional career. I, too, refer to myself as an educator even though I am seven years removed from the classroom. I noted this same educator identity with members of the OEA staff and governance I interviewed. Also, as an OEA staff member, I noted some marked differences in the lived experience of the Walkout in comparison to the educators, stakeholders, and even OEA governance.

Political activity was another layer of positionality. I have been actively involved in political aspects surrounding education for many years. My activism has been as simple as phone banking to face-to-face lobbying to running for Oklahoma State Senate in 2016. When gathering stories for the study, a variety of lessons surfaced for me. It became apparent that participants had a wide range of political understanding related to

the events of the Walkout and motivations for involvement. This awareness proves there is still ample room for conveying to teachers the impacts of politics and policy on education and the need for sustainable teacher activism.

During the timeframe leading up to the April Walkout, I was focusing my dissertation topic which included aspects of the political landscape of Oklahoma's education system and potential triggers to move people to political action. These areas of interest merged with my work as an OEA staff member. Communicating often with my committee chair, I told her there was a shift regarding people's attitudes toward the Oklahoma legislative body's continued apathy toward education funding. At the time of our conversations, I was not entirely sure what the shift was but I sensed it in the various interactions I had pertaining to my association work. My committee chair encouraged me to take note and delve into my lived experiences as events in the state began to unfold. With her advice in mind, I decided it would be best for me to allow aspects of the unfolding to occur before I solidified my dissertation topic. This proved vital since my original intent shifted once the Walkout began.

As I participated in the events surrounding the Walkout, I increased my awareness of broader components of Oklahoma's education landscape. Due to the importance of raising teacher voices in collective action, as well as limited scholarship in the area, I believed it vital to gather and preserve participants' stories of the Walkout. Gathering and preserving these account helps build understanding of the context and events involved. It also marks the Walkout and the climate of Oklahoma's education system and respects the transformative reflection of the individual's participation and support of the event.

It is also important that I lend my own personal narrative to the events surrounding the April 2018 Oklahoma Teacher Walkout. My positionality within OEA is unique not only as staff member and researcher, but also as a former OEA board member, former local president, and former educator at a public school district. Also, as a parent whose two children have attended public schools, I have a vested interest in the education system. In addition, I participated through organizing the outside logistics with my OEA colleagues. Through a critical lens, my various viewpoints provide insights into the challenges and possibilities of executing a Walkout in the Oklahoma context. These varied perspectives provide an enriching layer to the study and require me to address my lived experiences with ongoing reflexivity.

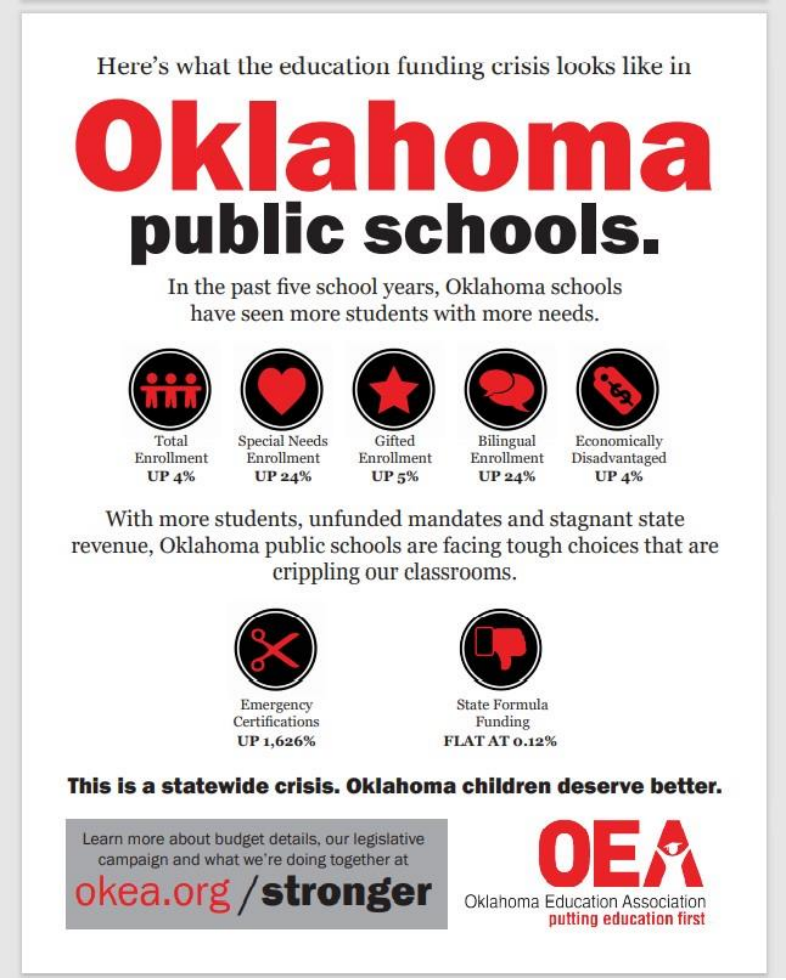
Events Leading Up to the April 2018 Oklahoma Teacher Walkout

In June 2017, the OEA Board of Directors, the governing body of the association, adopted a three-year imitative to increase education funding through legislative action. The plan titled *Together We're Stronger* (TWS) outlined areas OEA's Legislative and Political Organizers (LPOs) would collaborate with supportive legislators to co-create legislation and lobby to move the plan forward. As a new staff member in May 2017, one of my first job assignments was to have conversations with superintendents and local leaders throughout northwest Oklahoma during the summer and early fall of 2017 explaining the areas of focus and discussing possible actions that may be required if legislators did not work toward fulfilling the plan.

(*Figure 15, OEA Together We're Stronger Plan, OEA Communications, 2017)*

OEA's TWS had four areas of focus. The first focal area was a $10,000 pay increase for educators and a $5,000 raise for support professionals. The association estimated this at a cost of $740 million over a three-year legislative period. The second focal area was restoration of public education funding. In the past five years, Oklahoma had witnessed a 4% increase in student populations. The state had also had an enrollment increase of 24% for students with special needs and a 24% increase in its bilingual population. With unfunded mandates, increased student populations, and stagnant state

revenue, classroom funding had reached a crisis level. OEA's initiative sought to increase classroom funding by $200 million over its three-year plan. The third focus dealt with a 5% cost of living allowance increase (COLA) for education retirees. OEA believed the increase could come from within the pension itself and not require lawmakers to find new monies. Finally, funding core state services through recurring revenue was the fourth focus point. This piece called for state employees to receive a $7,500 pay raise at the cost of $500 million over the plan's three years (OEA, 2017).



(*Figure 16, OEA TWS Funding, OEA Communications, 2017*)

When visiting with superintendents and local leaders, we agreed that Oklahoma's education system was at a crisis level. Stories began to emerge around the focus of the

initiative. Some provided verbal support when discussing the need to contact legislators and to acknowledge and work toward the outlined goals. However, one question would typically surface, "What will happen if they don't pass anything?" My answer was always the same, "OEA is looking toward a job action."

Just the words, "job action," caused many people I encountered to tense. "What does that mean?" was the common question. When I answered that it could mean a teacher walkout, it was immediately followed with "When?" and "How long?". It was those questions that were difficult to answer. OEA did not know the *when* because we did not know *if* it would happen. Many variables hinged on the actions of the Oklahoma legislative body. The OEA LPOs knew the legislation would have to reflect a collective so that OEA, administrators, school boards, and other stakeholders could support and use it as a rallying point much like what happened in 1990 with HB1017. However, in the summer and early fall of 2017, when these conversations occurred, it was too early to know which actions OEA might ask educators to take. Ultimately, OEA hoped legislators would carry out their elected responsibilities and begin funding restoration and halt a walkout. However, based on past experiences, OEA knew a walkout was more likely than working successfully with the state legislators.

And how do you answer a question about the length of something that may not even happen? The walkout could be a day, a few days, or a week. So many answers depended on legislators passing pro-public education legislation and on the cooperation of superintendents, school boards, and community members supporting a teacher walkout. Since Oklahoma is a right-to-work state, educators do not have the ability to formally strike without facing potential repercussions from administrators and school

boards. While many claimed that if everyone left the classroom for a Walkout, school boards would not "fire them all." Although there is some truth in the logic, locals would face losing their ability to collectively bargain negotiated agreements, possibly having their local union decertified, and then would be left to the whims of administration.

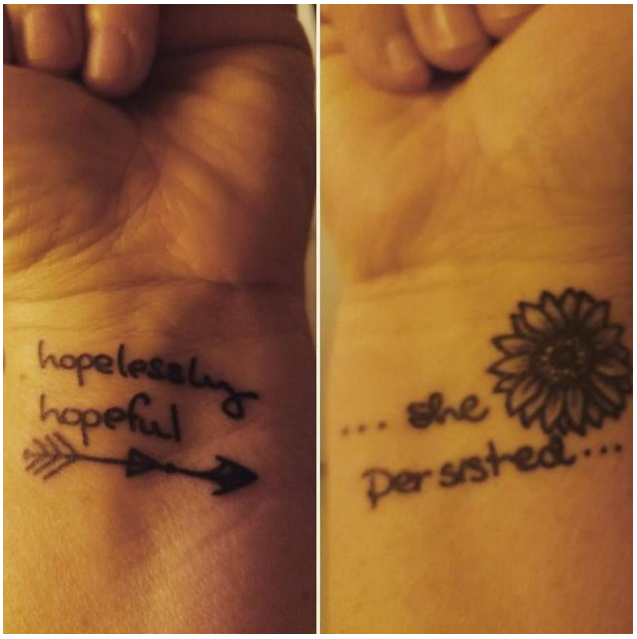
I did my best to answer their questions while maintaining a sense of hope that perhaps this time legislators would do the job they were elected to do. The first sign of hope arrived in August 2017 when Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin called for a special session in response to a budget shortfall. OEA rallied around the bipartisan Plan A+ that offered the first teacher pay raise in 10 years. We encouraged members to contact their legislators to vote in support. Although not perfect legislation, it was a much-needed beginning. On the day of the vote, I walked the Capitol halls with colleagues and educators visiting with legislators about the dire need for education monies. Educators sat in the offices of their legislators and told countless personal stories about their classroom realities and the continued impact of the legislative shunning. However, HB 1054 fell five votes short of obtaining the supermajority to pass from the House. A sense of continued defeat and continued disregard for education, Oklahoma's children, and Oklahoma's teachers seemed to permeate the air.

However, part of my job with OEA is to continue to build relationships and infuse the belief that together, we can and will impart change. With the defeat of HB1054, my colleagues and I went back to the superintendents, administrators, local leaders, and other stakeholders and reiterated the importance of the initiative and offered the reminder that a possible job action was looming. The words, job action, still offered pause but it was not met with as much resistance. They still asked questions and we still responded with

ambiguous answers, but during this time, I began to recognize a shift. Teachers were more willing to consider a walkout. Their righteous indignation was beginning to grow. A stronger sense of purpose and need for a collective voice was taking shape. Only a few wanted a walkout but most all realized the need for it. Superintendents and administrators tensed over the logistics, and board and community support. However, they were also beginning to understand there may not be a feasible alternative.

Then the next beacon of hope came in the form of the Step Up for Oklahoma plan introduced in the second special session in February. Again, OEA viewed this as a rallying point, encouraged stakeholders to reach out and ask their elected officials to support it. There was a renewed sense of hope.

I was hopelessly hopeful that realizing how close it came to a reality in November, the Oklahoma legislators would work together for the common good of Oklahoma's education system and pass the Step Up Plan. I had so much hope that I had the phrase, one that I use often, tattooed to my left wrist to compliment an earlier tattoo on my right wrist.



(Figure 17, Permanent Markers, Rhonda Harlow, 2018)

In February 2018, several thousand educators and stakeholders filled the halls and rotundas of the Capitol. Districts sent representative contingents to Oklahoma City so they could again visit with their legislators and offer personal stories to the crisis facing their schools. As OEA staff members, our day was spent directing people to their legislators, going with them to visit, if needed, and offering any forms of support to make it a comfortable process.

(Figure 18, Step Up Rally, Rhonda Harlow, 2018)

When the vote came down, it was worse than it had been with the Plan A+ in November. It was nowhere near the required supermajority to pass. The vote was left open and individuals began to lobby those legislators who had voted 'no' in the hope of changing their mind. Many considered the Step Up Plan to be a logical, bipartisan compromise to the budgeting situation. In the swirl of activity, it became apparent, we could not sway the 'no' vote. It was truly in that moment that I realized the walkout would happen. The Capitol had been packed with stakeholders from school districts across the state. Supporters such as the Oklahoma State Superintendent, Joy Hofmeister, OU President, David Boren, OSU President, Burns Hargis, and former OU football coach, Barry Switzer, had publicly pleaded with legislators to pass funding. Even oil and gas had compromised with the Step Up Plan. Yet, the legislators were not going to budge. In fact, more "no" votes occurred than with the earlier failed Plan A+ package.

As we drove home late that evening, a fellow OEA worker and I were both slightly baffled at the day's outcome. OEA ultimately thought the Step Up Plan would pass, even if the vote were close. There was the unwritten belief the legislators would act to quell talks of a walkout. The legislators did not. We knew the plans for the walkout were inevitable and the next few weeks were filled with a lot of planning but without a concrete date. OEA staff worked with locals to plan and worked with superintendents and school boards to pass board resolutions supporting the endeavor. The pace was frantic. Once the date was solidified, Monday, April 2, the acceleration of activity increased. There were town hall meetings across the state along with continuous changes as the legislature attempted to stall or prevent the action.

(Figure 19, Woodward EA Town Hall, Rhonda Harlow, 2018)

(*Figure 20, Enid EA Town Hall, Rhonda Harlow, 2018*)

Local Walkout Template

Pre-April 2 Communications

- ☐ We're sending regular communications to members about the walkout.
- ☐ We've had a general membership meeting about the walkout.
- ☐ We're doing work site meetings/visits to update members and potential members to explain the Together We're Stronger plan and promote the walkout.

Pre-April 2 Event Planning

- ☐ Our local has created a Walkout Action Team with team captains.
- ☐ We're planning a legislative town hall to encourage/pressure our elected officials to vote for the Together We're stronger plan.
- ☐ Our local is conducting before or after school informational picketing.
- ☐ Our local has established a local committee to identify community partners that will help find local resources to feed children and ensure the safety and wellbeing of students.
- ☐ Our local has set a road trip schedule for members to meet up and car pool to Oklahoma City.

Walkout Action Team Captains

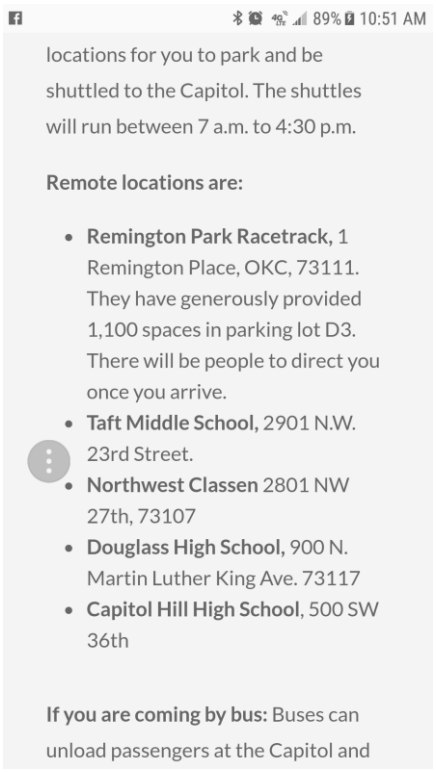
- **Local Captain.** Coordinates turnout for a school board meeting where a resolution supporting teacher pay increase and walkout is considered. Coordinates any community or legislative town hall meetings. Ensures pledge cards are distributed and collected at events and completed copies are sent to OEA for data entry within 24 hours of the event.
- **Community Support Captain.** Reaches out to the local PTA to develop a plan for feeding and watching kids during the walkout. Reaches out to local the student choir, band and/or orchestra directors, inviting student groups to sing or play at local events and/or at the Capitol.
- **Road Trip Captain.** Creates and distributes schedule of when members can meet together to pair up for road trips to Oklahoma City.

OEA | TOGETHER WE'RE STRONGER

(*Figure 21, OEA Local Walkout Template, OEA Communications Center, 2018*)

Sunday, April 1, 2018

I informed my family we would need to complete Easter celebrations early because I would be reporting to Oklahoma City to prepare for the first day of the Walkout. I was working with a team of my colleagues tending to bus duty. Essentially, we were tasked with directing traffic as school buses, chartered shuttle buses, vans, and other vehicles dropped participants off in front of the Capitol. Unsure of how many days the Walkout would occur since our staff email indicated we would have hotel rooms through Tuesday, I packed enough through Wednesday.



(*Figure 22, Directions via Text, Rhonda Harlow, 2018*)

As staff arrived that evening, we gathered at dinner to discuss our thoughts on the next day. Many felt we would be in OKC through the week. They believed the full impact would not be felt if we didn't stay out for at least five days. Others thought one, maybe two, days would be adequate and might wrap things up by Tuesday. We expected large crowds. We knew many of the state's largest districts had agreed to at least one day of total closure. We knew we had to be at our posts by 7:30 a.m. and that chartered shuttle buses would run until 5:00 p.m.

For me personally, I was filled with nervous energy. I knew this was going to be big. I knew we were looking at organized chaos. I also knew that for the first time, I would *not* be in the political mix. I would *not* be lobbying with fellow educators nor would I be a mere participant. This time – I was working – working to ensure people's

safety and to represent the association. Our months (quite frankly, even years) of laying the groundwork were finally going to be put to the test. It was near impossible to go to sleep that night. My alarm was set to go off at 5 AM. There was very little sleep that night as I tossed and turned thinking about the next day.

Week One

We arrived at the OEA office around 6:45 AM to begin our day. We were given walkie talkies, safety vests, and a rough idea at what the logistics should look like for directing traffic in front of the Capitol. That was pretty much it. No communications to hand out to people as they got off the bus. No directives given for what the day would look like. Just a walkie talkie and a safety vest and the name of the person in charge with the Highway Patrol. As we made the walk over to the Capitol, it was evident people were already beginning to arrive. The first day was filled with excitement and inspiration. The day was long and unseasonably cold. I had not packed in anticipation of winter-like mornings so I layered the best that I could.

(*Figure 23, Warming Up, Rhonda Harlow, 2018*)

It was evident people felt a purpose for being there. Adults arrived with children in tow. There were smiles and reunions as former students – now teachers – found former teachers in the crowd. Music played from the sound system. The crowds chanted and cheered as they walked around the Capitol.

(Figure 24, Outside the Capitol, Rhonda Harlow, 2018)

During the first week of the action, businesses and churches from across Oklahoma City delivered food, drinks, and other supplies needed for those attending. People would walk around handing out entire pizzas to crowds of participants. As one pizza delivery person made her way through the crowd, I asked if it was the company making the donation. She said it wasn't. In fact, people from around the state and even the country would call and pay for 10, 20, or 30 pizzas to be delivered to participants at the walkout. Orders came in from West Virginia, California, Texas, and other places from across the country.

On the first day there were approximately 35,000 people in attendance and each day the numbers grew. The Capitol was shut down daily due to capacity. Long lines of people stood at the three entrances to the Capitol, waiting for their chance to go inside and hopefully visit with their legislators. My team worked closely with the Oklahoma Highway Patrol and several of the officers, on more than one occasion, made comments on how it was the best controlled crowd they had ever encountered. We would just laugh and ask -- who knows better about crowd control and crowd management than educators?

We ended each day roughly around 5 PM. We had a short break around lunch time to walk back over to the OEA office, grab a quick bite to eat, use an actual bathroom rather than a porta potty, and then head back over to finish the day.

On the end of Monday and Tuesday, staff wondered if the walkout would wrap up by Wednesday. There still had not been clear communication since the original email stating we had hotel rooms until Wednesday morning. So after two days of working in a wide range of Oklahoma weather and standing on my feet for more than 10 hours a day, I woke up Wednesday morning, packed my bags, and checked out of my hotel room. I was fairly certain others, more important in the organization than me, knew something was going to happen and would make the call later in the day to return to the classrooms. By lunch that day, we were told we would be staying through the remainder of the week. So at the end of that evening, we went back to the hotel, checked back in, and unpacked. Since I had not fully prepared for an entire week away from home, I requested that a friend travelling back and forth with his school district bring me more pills and other needed items.

As the first week came to a close, my colleagues and I were fairly certain the walkout would continue through Wednesday of Week Two. We understood legislative leaders had made few concessions after Wednesday of Week One. However, there had been a big publicity push regarding the lady lawyers marching on to the Capitol on Monday, April 9th, making their way inside, and "fixing education problems" for teachers and the Oklahoma education system. Staff knew we would have to attend Monday. We also knew that a group of Tulsa classroom teachers were walking the 110-miles from Tulsa to Oklahoma City. They had left Tulsa on the Thursday of Week One. They were expected to arrive at the Capitol on Wednesday of Week Two.

As the first week ended, I realized the importance of effective internal and external communication. Cell service was limited or nonexistent. OEA staff on the inside was not aware of events on the outside and vice-versa. Those of us who worked the bus line thought of ourselves as the "first responders" to attendees because they walked by us daily as they arrived and left the Capitol grounds regardless of their form of transportation. Often, they would ask us what was happening "inside," which we could not answer.

Week One helped build community, as noted in Chapter V. The atmosphere on the Capitol grounds was one of camaraderie and focus. Supporters gave speeches from the stage and performers played inspiring and uplifting music. Not far from where we were located, there was what we deemed "Jenks Island" and the "Edmond campground." These schools, along with many others, had tents, chairs, grills, coolers, and other items for withstanding the elements. And every day someone from their representative group

would arrive at the Capitol as early as we did – 7:00 AM – to stake claim to their spot. It reminded me of the sacred church pew.

(Figure 25, Tent Cities, Rhonda Harlow, 2018)

Despite the exhausting first week, we still held a sense of hope and promise. It was more than evident that educators were ready to come back and continue fighting on Monday of Week Two.

We made it home fairly late Friday night. I distinctly remember sitting on my couch and crying for about an hour and a half. Crying because my back and my hips and my feet hurt so incredibly much and I wasn't sure I would ever feel normal again. I was swollen and bloated from eating the wrong kinds of foods and limiting my fluid intake so I didn't have to resort to the use of a portable bathroom. I loathed the idea of washing the same jeans and shirt and socks so I could put it all back on Monday. Crying because I felt so incredibly lost for words and the ability to communicate what was really taking place because I didn't have clear answers. People that I had built relationships with over the years were asking me questions, seeking answers to what was happening or would happen, and I had nothing to give them. There had been no staff meetings. There had

been no debriefings. Things that went wrong or needed tweaking or adjusting were sent via text message and were instigated by the staff not necessarily by management. We were just expected to figure it out and to tap dance around people's questions and concerns. And we did and we did it well, but I hated it. It was not transparent. It was antithetical to good communication that participants deserved.

I spent less than 36 hours at home that weekend. It was spent doing laundry, sleeping, attempting to spend time with my son, and fielding countless text messages, phone calls, and emails from people wanting to know "what if" and "when." We arrived home late on Friday and by mid- Sunday afternoon, my OEA colleague and I were back in the car. This time I packed for an entire week and then some. I told her I felt if I was over prepared this time, we would definitely be going home by Wednesday – maybe Thursday. I was wrong!

(*Figure 26, Quick Respite, Rhonda Harlow, 2018*)

Week Two

On Monday, Patti and I arrived at the Capitol at our normal 7:00 AM. On this day, people were arriving early. It was the day of the lady lawyers and the pivotal day to show the legislators, we were back and we "mean it." Monday of Week Two was by far the largest crowd at the Capitol – 50,000 people. By 9:00 AM the Capitol was closed due to capacity. 50,000 people – men, women, children, and not including family pets.

(Figure 27, Capitol Halls, Doug Folks, OEA Staff, 2018)

It was the first time during the Walkout that I felt overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude and responsibility of keeping people safe from moving vehicles. Those of us working this area had to start escorting buses and cars through the crowds yelling "Make way – moving vehicles – mind the road" as loudly as possible. Not only were buses and vans trying to drop off and pick up people, legislators were trying to make way to their parking spots. Where Week One had reflected patience, the tone of Week Two became more defiant. Participants would not make way or would simply ignore our requests. Legislators would not slow down; or, when roads were finally closed, they would elect to ignore both us and the highway patrolman and continue to drive through the crowds –

honking loudly. Everyone was a little more sensitive to events, and those I knew felt physically and emotionally drained. Other than drawing an extremely large crowd, the presence of the lady lawyers did little to spur the education conversation inside the Capitol. Week Two was a blur of endless days managing Capitol traffic flow, receiving limited amounts of communication from OEA, and experiencing every ache and pain imaginable.

(*Figure 28, Sea of Porta Potties, Rhonda Harlow, 2018*)

Staff learned about OEA abruptly halting the Walkout along with everyone else, which left a sense of unfinished business. I sat with colleagues in the OEA lobby during the press conference. We were advised to leave the building due to potential threats from people who were angry the Walkout had been called. A large group of us went to dinner that evening and attempted to celebrate that it was over. However, the feelings felt forced. On the final day at the Capitol, Friday, the crowds were sparse, and we were headed home early that evening. I came home to things that I love and tried to recharge myself.

(Figure 29, My dog (that I love), Rhonda Harlow, 2018)

(*Figure 30, My cat (that I loved), Rhonda Harlow, 2018)*

(*Figure 31, My Boy/Baby (whom I love), Rhonda Harlow, 2018*).

As OEA staff, we knew we needed to prepare for the fallout, but we also knew we needed to try and sustain the engagement.

CHAPTER IX

DISSCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The primary purpose of this oral history study was to elicit, preserve, and explore individual accounts of supporters of the April 2018 Oklahoma Teacher Walkout. This study is grounded in the social foundations of education which focuses on the social, philosophical, historical, and cultural processes of education. In social foundations, education can take place in both informal and formal contexts. The study builds an understanding of teacher activism within a conservative socio-political state and the underlying educator desires for the legislature and public stakeholders to *see* and *hear* their educational issues and concerns. By gaining knowledge of individual experiences and actions, a broader portrait of historical phenomenon and events emerged which created a deeper understanding and descriptions of the Walkout's surrounding events. The accounts themselves are important as testimonies of teacher voice. In addition, as aligned with oral history methodology, this study provides glimmers of the historical significance components where possible along with substantive narrative accounts.

Further, scholarship indicates the series of 2018 teacher walkouts across the nation that occurred in early 2018 spoke to educator frustrations at the impact of austerity and politics shaping their classrooms and a "newfound sense of individual and collective power" (Blanc, 2019, p. 4; Nuñez et al., 2015). For this study, I collected the oral

histories of 22 Walkout participants using a semi-structured interview protocol and photo-elicitation method as a dialogue prompt (Harper, 2002). I utilized varied approaches to analysis which included but were not limited to drawing, visual representations and data display, data poems, and emotional analysis. In this chapter, I will summarize the major themes that emerged from participants' accounts discussed in previous chapters. I will also answer my inquiry questions that focus on both educators' experiences, aligned with oral histories' purpose of preservation and understanding, and broader insights they offer into Oklahoma educators, education dynamics, and political systems. I discuss how the central themes connect to future endeavors facing educators and the important role of context for shaping forms of activism and job actions in which educators engage that will be effective in that context. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, areas for future research, and a brief summary.

This chapter contains discussion and future research possibilities which support answers to the Inquiry Questions:

1. What triggered participants to join in the events of the April 2018 Oklahoma Teachers Walkout?
2. After participating in the Walkout, what do the participants envision for the future for Oklahoma's education system?
3. What varied experiences did participating in the Walkout have for narrators?
4. What do participants' stories reveal about the context and significance of this teacher collective action in a right-to-work state?

The primary goal was to preserve supporters' voices, aligned with oral history (Perks & Thomson, 2016; Sheftel & Zembrzycki, 2013), rather than traditional social

science methods of primarily contributing to scholarship. As narrators shared their lived experiences surrounding the Walkout, themes began to emerge which answered the inquiry questions and became salient for broader dialogue about teacher activism and job actions in Oklahoma. Varied themes were illustrative of connections across accounts focused on first, the participants' emotional experiences magnified through using teacher voice to be seen and heard, physically and symbolically, during the Walkout experience; second, narrators' sense that the Walkout both reflected and invited *new* connections and communities of belonging through assembly; and third, components of mattering (Flett, 2018) as educators framed their Walkout participation around student and education mattering and against their perceptions that the legislators dismissed their concerns. These themes were interconnected.

The first theme found in Chapter IV, teacher voice and emotion, displayed varied threads: 1) participants' emphasis on the emotional experiences surrounding the Walkout; 2) bodily terms and metaphors used to describe various Walkout elements, teacher voice, and vulnerability; 3) embodied sensory components memorable to their experiences; and 4) the political meaning of physical representation of bodies gathering en masse. For the second theme found in Chapter V, community creation and expansion, strands emerged from narratives that offered the participants heightened awareness of an expanding community of stakeholders. Narrators perceived a sense of community among other educators, but then expanded to familial-like connections, and finally included conceptions of community among those who are like-minded supporters of education all gathering in protest. I also address fractures within community that emerged from the stories adding a layer to the Walkout's complexities.

The final theme, found in Chapter VI, studied centered on components of mattering/antimattering (Flett, 2018), a psychological concept, in which I read the narrators' accounts. Through inductive analysis, I recognized that educators felt a sense of mattering through their participation in the Walkout and through the affirmation the greater public, the other unions, their students, and their children provided. The echo of teacher blame (D'Amico-Pawlewicz, 2020) prevalent in the broader national culture is salient as well. The third theme also stresses educators joining in collective action to make visible through the politics of assembly that Oklahomans' education matters. Throughout the data, emotional terms and descriptions were prevalent and influential in Walkout experiences and propelling collective action. All of these factors illuminated components of the socio-political landscape of Oklahoma education that contextualize the Walkout.

Responses to Inquiry Questions and Interpretation of the Findings

While each participant had various lived experiences surrounding the Walkout, each of the themes, along with a majority of the theme strands, were prominent and dynamic factors in the narratives. First, narratives from this study framed the Walkout as an intense emotional expression of teacher voice. Second, narrators experienced an expanded-sense of community with other Walkout participants and supporters. Third, participants expressed components of mattering/antimattering in relation to interactions and perceptions of the legislature and groups associated with the Walkout. Together this study contributes to the limited scholarship on teacher activism by giving voice to those educators and stakeholders who assembled en masse on the state's Capitol for nine days

in April. In the following sections, I connect the themes to the Inquiry Questions. The first question addresses triggers that activated narrators to participate in the Walkout.

Narrators' Triggers to Participate

As participants reflected on Walkout events, they described several emotional triggers that moved them to take collective action. Narrators shared emotional accounts of feeling like educators and education was neither seen nor heard at the legislative level. They expressed varied emotions ranging from "anger" to "frustration" to "tiredness" connected to continued legislative neglect based on years of state funding cuts that impacted the quality of Oklahoma's education system. They felt disrespected and dismissed by the legislature. For example, several described the need for adequate classroom resources and smaller class sizes to meet student needs.

Narrators' emotional accounts echoed Flett's (2018) work regarding the psychological components of "mattering." Several participants spoke of feeling insignificant to the legislature, and by extension, the public when, in previous years, state questions did not pass that would have increased education funding. Educators were dissatisfied with their treatment within the political system and even questioned whether they mattered at a societal level. Some narrators believed that for too long educational needs (not wants) were being ignored or disregarded as frivolous by legislatures within an extreme culture of fiscal austerity in Oklahoma. Some narrators' emotions simmered for several years and eventually "hit a boiling point" manifesting in their participation in the Walkout. Grassroots social activism and OEA efforts to gain legislative attention also sowed seeds that a Walkout might occur.

Part of that "boiling point" came when the legislature attempted to appease the threat of a work stoppage by passing a teacher pay raise days before the OEA-imposed April 2 deadline. Governor Fallin requested teachers visit the Capitol for one-day and "thank" the legislative body for the pay increase. Several narrators viewed this as an insulting gesture by the state's top-elected official. This public act of disrespect fueled several participants to action. In fact, Linda R. stated

> I can't tell you how many times colleagues and I, myself, have sent thank yous to the legislatures, to the governing forces, to all of those who seem to have a stake in this. I appreciate what you've done. You know, all of that kind of thing but I felt like we had really reached the point that it was not the time to say thank you. If you haven't heard us say thank you for these years, you're not going to hear us now. And a lot of them [referencing legislators] didn't hear us now, as far as saying thank you or what we needed.

She believed it was time to collectively tell the legislature "this is what we have to have."

Participants were frustrated as well that the pay raise did not include classroom funding. Most narrators reiterated that the Walkout was more about *the students* and *classroom funding* than the teacher pay raise. This framing not only reflected narrators' investments, but it was an effective element for mobilizing in the Oklahoma context that does not have the same union structures to support or history of labor activism than do other contexts, such as Chicago and West Virginia. With interest, I noted that few participants addressed the pay increase for support personnel, the COLA, and the original ask of a pay increase for state employees. Instead, they often framed their reasons as funding neglect of education and students. Research supports that student-centered

messaging often garners more educator and public support as evidenced in the 2012 CTU strike (Blanc, 2019; Brogan, 2012; Nuñez et al., 2015; Robert & Tyssens, 2008).

The "what we have to have" list included increased classroom funding in order to provide more resources for students. The majority of the narrators viewed the Walkout as being "for the kids" because as educators, they placed significance on students and education's future. Blanc (2019) states that "educators made a compelling case that they weren't walking from the students, but *for them*" (p.79; emphasis added). Overall, narrators believed the culture of austerity evidenced through years of legislative disrespect offered the Walkout as the only viable option. As I narrate in Chapter VIII, many educators and education stakeholders initially felt reluctance to support a job action. However, the build-up to the Walkout showed a steady growth of support resulting in less reluctance to engage. Blanc (2019) contends the majority of labor actions are oriented to gaining respect (p. 24). In the case of the Oklahoma Walkout, the respect spotlighted students and education.

For some, neoliberal elements shaping education, and feeling "choked and starved" by policies were trigger points. Due to continued distrust among educators for the legislature to tend to educational needs, some teachers felt there was no other choice than to physically assemble at the Oklahoma Capitol in demonstration of education and its students. In fact, several participants, including the OEA president, stated they *did not want* to walk out but *had* to walk out to support education. Most narrators viewed the needs of education as bipartisan. As awareness began to emerge regarding the impact of policy and the legislature on the day-to-day happenings in classrooms, a few educators made connections between the political process and their classrooms. As understanding

of those connections began to solidify, the emotions surrounding the political rhetoric and treatment propelled some teachers to take action for the first time. Denise addressed this when she said,

> It brought an awareness to people and just how the whole process works. It educated us because we had to educate ourselves on how it all worked because they let, you know, they really do look at your voting record and they don't pay attention to what you're saying if you don't live in their area but they do pay attention to people within their area. And they do. When you call them, they pull up your voting record right then, you know. How the whole ins and outs work. And how it's really not as scary. You can go in and talk to people. Some people aren't approachable and learning that's your (pause). It's not their place. It's your place. They're representing you and so, you can talk to other people that aren't your representative also but your data (pause). You'll be listened to but they won't necessarily track your data. I mean everything (pause). They need to hear from not the same people over and over. If they're not hearing from other people (pause). They just want to hear from people, and they do have to something with all of that but if you're not allowing just a few to represent your area then (long pause).

For those who identified as long-time education advocates, they viewed the Walkout as an extension to the groundwork that had been cultivated years prior to the event.

There were other contributing factors. Some narrators acted based simply on a trust and respect for their local administration and association leaders in their networks. For those participants, the relationships built at the local level mattered for action. Others

found unity in social media groups that formed. All these triggers circle back to the teacher desire to be seen and heard on behalf of the education profession and recognizing enough support from the Oklahoma public to take action.

Hope for Oklahoma's Education System

The second question addressed the narrators' hopes for the future of Oklahoma's education system. The word "hope" was used repeatedly by the majority. Their hopes reflected elements of the three central themes. Some advocated for the need for continued change. Again, they discussed the continued need for educators to become more involved in the political process by volunteering for campaigns, voting for pro-public education candidates, and staying informed and engaged with the political process. Katie stated,

> I think it [the Walkout] created a fire and I think there's lots of teachers that maybe hadn't had a voice that are now stepping up and speaking up that are (pause). They are paying attention at the elections. I think lawmakers, also. They hopefully realize that we're actually (pause). I feel like they were just doing their thing, and no one really paid attention to them and now, we're starting to pay attention. And I think, just that, can help. They are going to have to answer questions about the votes they make.

A few narrators entered the events of the Walkout with a clear understanding of the political connection to education. Others had that connection solidified during the Walkout and developed a stronger understanding of the legislature's impact on the day-to-day events of their classrooms. Most participants stated a desire to continue their political involvement on varying levels after the Walkout and to involve other educators, and students, in the process, too. Participants appeared to gain an understanding that the

psychological need to matter was vital to the legislative process and that electing what one participant deemed “the right people” could assist in avoiding education antimattering (Flett, 2018) in the future.

Although the overarching word for what narrators wanted for the future was “hope,” an element of caution also emerged. Several discussed learning more about the legislative process through doing the work of the Walkout and therefore developed a richer understanding of their place in the process (Ellingson, 2017). However, a few acknowledged that although their understanding increased, the embodied demands of teaching often impeded the embodied work of political engagement in walkouts, keeping up with legislative actions, and staying attuned to current events affecting education. Blanc (2019) states that “most working-class people learn about social power through their experiences in struggle and mass organizing...ideas like solidarity or collective action” (p.88). Essentially, some narrators learned elements of collective action, or extended their learning, through the *doing* (Harlow & Bailey, under review).

This cautiously optimistic stance continued as some narrators discussed “we” expansion and the need to maintain the feeling of education mattering within those groups and sustaining the momentum created from the Walkout. Narrators talked about engaging educators in the political process after the Walkout in order to improve education mattering at the legislative level. In turn, some realized that the feeling one mattered to other communities could shift to antimattering, too. A few participants expressed their disappointment in the abrupt end of the Walkout but also acknowledged that community support could be waning. Regardless of the elements of caution, the majority of participants expressed “hope and optimism about the possibility of change

and positive outcomes" (Flett, 2018, p. 288) of the Walkout. Flett (2018) believes this stance occurs in those with more positive outlooks when they believe that their lives and activities matter to others. From the collective assembly of like-minded souls representing education, narrators felt physically and visibly affirmed as mattering on a societal and political level than what they had prior to the Walkout.

The Experiential Effects of the Walkout

The third question seeks to understand the "take-aways" narrators experienced from participating, which overlaps with some elements of the response to question two in relation to the emotional thread and hopes for Oklahoma's education future. For the narrators, the most profound connection appeared to be the heightened sense of affirmation, of mattering, they experienced through collective action. The event was exhilarating to many and an important articulation of collective teacher voice. Aware of the culture of teacher blame and legislative dismissal, some felt uncertain about the degree of public support they had for their work or the Walkout. Some equated this uncertainty to failed state questions that would have helped fund education while others connected it to the continued election of public officials who did not support public education. Several saw it simply in terms of their fatigue and crowded classrooms.

This sense of societal mattering emerged as part of the forging of different layers of community. When discussing the various forms of "we," of feelings of belonging to different collectives, narrators covered all of the Flett's (2018) components of mattering: importance, attention, dependence, noted absence, appreciation, ego extension, and individualism (p. 32). Participants felt affirmed that by leaving their classrooms, they were supporting students and education in a form that was imperative to education

mattering. Participants viewed the support of the community expansion as education mattering at the societal level. For narrators this bolstered the sense of education's importance within the community expansion.

Walkout participants also raised attention to education's needs by gathering with others through collective assembly (Butler, 2015). These bodies gathered en masse to symbolized educators and students. Also, present was the symbolic representation of needed classroom resources characterized by such items as tattered textbooks. By vacating their classrooms and/or halting instruction, the teachers' absence highlighted societal dependence on the education profession. As one narrator articulated, "we fill the gap and we're a commodity that is not replaceable easily."

The support and expansion of community provided a psychological sense of mattering. Some of these signs of appreciation were Walkout supporters and care for participants' bodily needs (food, water, places to rest) (Butler, 2015; Ellingson, 2017). As the sense of community and belonging expanded and support became more apparent, participants experienced "ego extension" meaning that they felt others were vested in educators and education and valued the events (Flett, 2018, p. 32). This mattering component is evidenced when narrators spoke of students, parents, community members and organizations, such as the Teamsters, stepping up to support them. The final component of Flett's (2018) concept, individualism, is evidenced when narrators addressed components of assembly. Narrators described the events as unique to educators and education because teachers treated the Capitol grounds as their classroom by cleaning up after themselves, bringing their own toilet paper so not to be a burden (much like bringing their classroom resources), forming a teacher marching band that repeatedly

played “We’re not Going to Take It,” and using wit, creativity, and sarcasm to create their protest signs in markers, glitter, and crayons. For many, the Walkout was a premier example of an extended peaceful protest.

Another effect was Walkout participants’ appreciation of involving their own children and/or students in Capitol protests and local organizing. They perceived the children as advocates for the future. Few narrators used words such as activist or advocate to describe themselves or the work they were doing. However, nearly all who mentioned the children’s role in the Walkout expressed hope that students and their children would be empowered by and engaged with the political process. First, narrators viewed it as a personal accomplishment, either as a parent or an educator, that students would willingly participate and advocate for themselves, their teachers, and public education. Several spoke of students and/or child involvement with marked emotion and as empowering and transformative to witness. Symbolizing, as well, the very people they were working to serve.

On a professional level, students/children support signaled the hope for the collective future of public education and Oklahoma. Narrators wanted the students/children to recognize the connections between the political and education systems and to understand their involvement could render positive changes for themselves and education in future. Participants used multiple synonyms (such as “my kids” and “the future”) as they discussed the students/children participation in the Walkout. This hope-filled stance connected to the continued belief that in order for education to matter at the political and societal level, not only educators but their children and students had to become a part of the process to enact positive change.

Some also recognized that, like students, teachers also needed to be politically aware and engaged. Some suggested the importance of continuing to build relationships and establish communication with legislators. There was also the connection to the need for teacher activism. However, this need is met with the reality that it is difficult to build and sustain continued advocacy.

Revelations, Context, and Significance

The final question looks to the participants' stories to seek understanding about the socio-political context in which the collective action took place, the unique regional dimensions of this walkout in a right-to-work-state. In this sense, I am focused on what narrators' stories reveal about the unique features of the *context* of the Walkout. I focus on the organizational challenges and uneven knowledge about work actions and right-to-work laws in Oklahoma and its implications for teacher unions. In addition, I discuss how narrators center their discourse around students' needs and education's needs rather than teacher labor or teacher activism. Also, reflected in the stories, the Walkout focused on changing the education landscape in Oklahoma for the betterment of its children and their future with less emphasis on educators' needs. I also address the education mattering focus of the Walkout.

The stories revealed the varying degree of awareness among educators about legislative actions, the *Janus* decision, and right-to-work laws. Oklahoma is limited in its collective bargaining abilities; therefore, it has several non-bargaining school districts in the state. This dynamic played out in Walkout events. News accounts and some teachers accounts reflected insufficient awareness of the rules about work stoppages that is a vital area of understanding about teachers' rights in a right-to-work state. These varied

understandings created some miscommunications about the Walkout among narrators, and more broadly, among OEA organizers and grass roots movements. For example, some, such as Kevin, Matt, and Cari, had a firm understanding of right-to-work laws, collective bargaining parameters, and their connections to how the Walkout unfolded. Some stories revealed understanding of the political process and how it tied to legislation, policy, and education. Other stories did not reveal those connections. For example, one narrator described her encouragement to colleagues to "call in sick" when there was speculation her district would not close and support the Walkout. Because calling in sick en masse could be considered a strike-like activity in a right-to-work state (70 O.S. Section 509.8), this comment marks a clear misunderstanding of the type of actions educators could legally take to participate in the Walkout. Teacher education programs and teachers' unions should educate teacher candidates and current educators on their workplace rights, roles, and responsibilities – especially in a right-to-work state.

Blanc (2019) states that the labor unions in the 2018 "red wave" states "were numerically weak and/or hollowed out" (p. 88) due to their right-to-work status. This weakened status is evident in narrators' sense the Walkout did not have a clear leader with a focused message. Also, in a right-to-work state, an individual is not required to join their union. This weakens the unions ability to hold centralized power and to effectively communicate with nonmembers and sometimes, rank-and-file members. OEA had a narrow audience leading up to the Walkout when the three-year *TWS* campaign began. Prior to the Walkout, the audience had not fully moved beyond OEA governance, local leaders, and some school administration. As tensions escalated and were fueled by the social media groups, OEA accelerated the Walkout timeline (Blanc, 2019). This

decision left some rank-and-file members and nonmembers lacking clear, concise messaging going into the Walkout (Blanc, 2019). There was criticism from both OEA and the grassroots social media groups on how communications were handled. This speaks to wider communication issues as well that inhibit seamless organizing that could maximize effect (Blanc, 2019). These complexities in understanding and in communicating fostered missed opportunities for locals, members leaders, and education stakeholders to build valued relationships which could have resulted in a more organized and cohesive statewide effort.

It also speaks to a lack of understanding of OEA's structure, its responsibility to members and non-members, and union membership in the state. Some hold the perception OEA represents all Oklahoma educators. While OEA does represent Oklahoma education and lobbies for supportive education policies and legislation, it is a member-driven, democratically represented organization that represents its dues-paying members. Nonmembers are only represented through collective bargaining in locals with bargaining rights. Even then, the nonmembers' representation does not extend beyond the negotiated agreement. As Alicia, the President of OEA, pointed out in her interview, when OEA called the end to the Walkout, it was pulling the logistical supports and pivoting its membership to focus on the 2018 campaign-cycle. The work was clearly not over.

Also evident through the stories about this historic event is that some did not automatically equate their labor as a teacher to other labor organizations supporting the Walkout. Unlike teachers in West Virginia (Blanc, 2019), few participants had a developed understanding of labor unions and their connection to teachers' unions. In fact,

the primary rhetoric in the Walkout emphasized serving schools and children rather than advocating for *teachers' labor*. Yet these issues are firmly connected. Participants acknowledged and appreciated the support of the Teamsters, the AFL-CIO, and those laborers at the Capitol who halted their work in solidarity with the teachers. However, the accounts that I collected did not reflect a strong connection between teacher labor and worker labor. Instead, the support was viewed as affirmation of a like-minded community supporting education rather than union solidarity. This type of (mis)understanding, differing from West Virginia and Chicago, reveals socio-cultural regional dimensions of the Oklahoma Walkout. These dimensions include erratic teacher involvement in unions and in labor activism, some bipartisan coalitions on behalf of education, Oklahoma's weak union presence, and importantly, teachers' primary framing of Walkout support as a form of *advocacy for children and education* rather than labor activism or activism.

Implications for Research

Within the last few years, there has been an insurgence of education movements across the United States (Blanc, 2019; Brogan, 2014; D'Amico-Pawlewicz, 2020; Nuñez et al., 2015). Prior to that, the majority of education-led strikes occurred within local districts in larger cities that had a stronger political power (Scribner, 2015). These actions have fueled the development of some scholarship about education job actions and the impact it has on educators as individuals, professionals, and education as a collective (D'Amico-Pawlewicz, 2019; Weiner & Asselin, 2020). In this section, I will discuss how this oral history study, in addition to preserving teacher voice, broadens research as applied to embodiment of assembly, importance of community and feelings of mattering in education labor, and the value of teacher voice.

Embodiment of Assembly

By delving into the physicality and the sheer embodiment of assembly that emerged in the oral histories, I extend the type of scholarship conducted on teacher actions. There remains important work to be done in bridging the mind/body divide that often exists within education scholarship. As Ellingson (2017) states "an alternate approach integrates body, mind, and spirit: 'we do not have bodies, we are bodies'" (Trinh, 1999, p. 258). We enact our body-selves in everyday life. And as such, we do our bodies" (pp.11-12). The Walkout was an embodied act. Highlighting that component is an important element of narrators' experiences and the embodiment of "teacher voice." It required participants to use their bodies as a form of assembly and protest. I tended to elements of embodiment in the research by, "coding data ... to sensory terms, descriptions of body parts or bodily functions, or implications of bodily knowledge" (Ellingson, 2015, p. 7). Butler's (2015) research also speaks to the embodiment of collective action. She states that "resistance has to be *plural* and it has to be *embodied*" (Butler, 2015, p. 217). This further enriches embodiment scholarship.

Also, there is a connection among austerity, education, and embodied assembly. As education funding decreases and teacher pay stagnates, there are real effects on educators and families. For example, many educators, "roughly one in five" (Blanc, 2019, p. 20), work a second (or maybe a third) job in order to meet financial and bodily (such as food, shelter, clothing) needs (Blair, 2018; Butler, 2015). One participant spoke of his decision to not marry and have children because he knew he could not financially support a family on a teacher's salary. Other participants spoke of the understanding that they would not be wealthy going into education, but they should at least be able to make

ends meet. Blanc (2019) asserts that recent teacher actions have been in light of "uninterrupted working-class defeats and neoliberal austerity" (p. 9). Narrators in this study stressed that their decision to Walkout was based less on the teacher pay raise and more on education mattering. However, the connection is still evident. It was simply not the primary public framing of the Walkout nor was it the primary framing of the oral accounts I collected. In Butler's (2015) works, she discusses how assembly is "also an equally fundamental struggle over how bodies will be supported in the world" (p. 72).

Mattering, Community Expansion, and the Value of Teacher Voice

Flett (2018) acknowledges a need for further research when associating the components of mattering with community (p. 272). These oral histories highlight the Walkout as a place of affirmation and opportunity to extend one's sense of community. Also, present within and across the stories, educators expressed the need to be seen and heard by the legislatures and community. Nuñez et al. (2015) states "teachers need to start speaking up about education policy...talking to one another about how the 'reforms'...have affected our lives" (p. 119). In this study, several participants spoke about policy, the political process, and its impact and connection to their classrooms. However, no one made explicit connections between neoliberalism infusing education or Oklahoma austerity as conditions shaping their work lives or used the word "neoliberal." This absence speaks to the need for increasing school workers' understanding about and critical consciousness of neoliberal education (Giroux, 1983; Rodriguez, 2015) as a powerful force in their work lives. Also, unlike teachers strikes in Chicago (Brogan, 2014; Nuñez et al., 2015; Rodriguez, 2015), the Oklahoma Walkout did not frame itself around social justice unionism and the union did not have a militant rank-and-file

member base to assist in the grassroots organizing efforts of the Walkout (Blanc, 2019; Brogan, 2014). This study adds to literature by addressing the complexities of a right-to-work state with weakened union power taking collective action and points to organizing lessons as well.

As the narratives unfolded surrounding the expanding sense of community there was a connection to mattering/antimattering as an educator in relation to legislators and to stakeholders. A connection to the mattering/antimattering of the education collective with society and with the legislature is also evident. Further work surrounding mattering components with a collective identity could prove beneficial on several layers. In Butler's (2015) work, she claims, "human action depends upon all sorts of support - it is always supported action" (p. 72). Strands of individual mattering/antimattering surfaced along with collective mattering/antimattering. This claim is supported by Flett's components of mattering when applied to the community expansion and teacher voice. Educators experienced an affirmation of mattering when their awareness of "we" expanded. In this affirmation and awareness, there was the sensed support in "doing right." In turn, this offered educators the support needed to stand up to and against legislators during the course of the Walkout. This study adds to Flett's (2018) scholarship by applying mattering/antimattering to educators and education. Also, previous research (Brickner, 2016; Brogan, 2014; Nuñez et al, 2015; Rodriguez, 2015) focuses on teacher strikes in Chicago and Philadelphia, along with other urban cities. My study builds on the understanding of what spurs a collective in a conservative, right-to-work state to willingly move into assembly and action.

Implications for Practice

Some accounts reflect a lack of understanding of the political-education connection. Although some understood the political process in depth, others shared that colleagues and stakeholders did not share that understanding. Only a few used the words, "activist" or "advocate," when referencing themselves. The accounts primarily reflect a 'weak' educator activism identity which raises concerns for future educator political engagement in the state. It also raises questions about how best to foster such identities effectively and how to form coalitions for political engagement beyond voting.

It should also be noted that components of mattering/antimattering could be applied to the OEA relationship with educators. Several participants indicated a sense of antimattering surrounding the Walkout in relation to OEA. This mattering/antimattering was most poignant when OEA abruptly ended the Walkout. Because several, including OEA staff, felt a lack of communication and a sense of antimattering in relation to OEA, participants felt resistant to backing an association they believed was not backing their collective interests. The oral histories support the continued importance that educators feel like they, and their profession matters. In addition, mattering components is thus relevant as well to the OEA's work with its members.

The sense of mattering may offer new layers in the current education landscape surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. During the Walkout, educators felt affirmed through the expansions of community they experienced. They felt supported. Parents and education stakeholders supported teachers and their need to be seen and heard at the legislative level. However, in 2020, several parent groups and some school boards have moved to an antimattering stance with educators regarding the various safety protocols

that have been placed in school districts. Once again, educators are navigating a system that does not desire to hear them or see them as professionals advocating for their profession, their students, and in this case, their health and safety.

Limitations and Recommendation for Future Research

An oral history approach was important for this study. Yet, to collect narratives of teachers on the frontlines of this walkout, I acknowledge there was a limited range and number of narratives captured for the study. I would have liked to collect more accounts over the course of the Walkout. Although I was not able to capture narratives from each of the 77 counties in the state, to be able to explore the range of embodied experiences and takeaways from the Walkout, I was able to capture narratives from the metropolitan, suburban, and rural areas including each quadrant of the state. My narrators were primarily white, which also speaks to the limited racial diversity among Oklahoma educators. There is also limited representation from the grassroots activists. These components potentially complicate reasons individuals became involved with the Walkout including their history of activism, their thoughts and opinions on racial tensions in Oklahoma, and their identification as activists.

Several areas for future research have emerged from my findings. The last Walkout in Oklahoma occurred in 1990. Since Oklahoma educators rarely engage in multi-day collective action, it would be of interest to research other forms of activism that shape Oklahoma's education system. More research is needed on walkouts in right-to-work states to complicate and layer scholarship. Future research could include union members and nonmembers' understanding of collective bargaining, right-to-work laws, and its implications for their profession. It is also of interest to address the up rise of

social justice unionism to determine if it has viability in a socio-political state with weakened unionism. In light of the 2012 CTU strike and its internal union restructuring, further research on the internal tensions within union structures is beneficial. In addition, further research needs to happen regarding unions in right-to-work state and unionism's impact on collective action.

Also, additional research pertaining to rank-and-file members and their sense of mattering in relation to union membership would prove valuable. Furthermore, there is a need for research that addresses the rurality of Oklahoma and the impact it has on educators' understanding of right-to-work laws, social justice unionism, and union structures, and willingness to participate in advocacy initiatives or job actions. In relation to the Walkout, additional understandings could be gleaned from conducting research that included research participants who chose not to participate and support the Walkout. Along the same vein, further research focused on the legislators' perspectives and grassroots activists' perspectives could enrich scholarship on teacher Walkouts. Participants discussed the need for continued engagement with the political process after the Walkout. Research that addresses teacher activism in relationship to education supportive campaigns and education supportive policy would assist in determining sustained teachers' activism post collective action.

Several participants spoke of the physicality of the Walkout and its impact on the body. Additional interviews with the participants could provide long-term accounts on the emotional and physical implications of the Walkout. In addition, future research could investigate the lasting embodied effects of teacher blame, legislative dismissals, and participation in collective action. In addition, there is a need for stronger work on women

of color involved in teachers strikes and activism. Also, racial dimensions of the educational conditions of austerity and attention to gender should be addressed through teacher education programs.

Few educators in this study organically identify themselves as activists during the course of their oral histories. Although teacher activism takes varied forms (Lynn, 2018; Montaño et al., 2002; Picower, 2011, 2012) there remains a limited, long-term understanding of educator activism in all its manifestations. Too often, activism becomes equated to emotionally charged, public displays such as the Walkout (Butler, 2015). Only a few participants outlined activism as being informed, involved, and on-going. Further, there is a long history of resistance in Oklahoma, including an activist socialist history (Joyce, 2007). Greater understanding of effective local teacher advocacy and activist practices, aligned with Oklahoma cultures and politics, is needed (Lynn, 2018).

One participant correlated the lack of the political-education connection to the absence of educating future teachers in university education programs. Research could survey university education programs and coursework to determine if a political-education connection course is taught to teacher candidates. Then focus groups could be conducted of candidates that were then followed-up with interviews within the educators first, 1-2 years in the classroom to determine if a teacher activist identity had been developed. This type of study could prove beneficial to establishing a stronger sense of teacher activism within the education system.

Conclusion

Three thematic findings emerged from the narratives of the Walkout. First, narratives from this study framed the Walkout as an intense emotional expression of

teacher voice. Second, narrators experienced an expanded-sense of community with other Walkout participants and supporters. Third, participants expressed components of mattering/antimattering in relation to interactions and perceptions of the legislature and groups associated with the Walkout.

Together this study contributes to the limited scholarship on teacher activism by giving voice to those educators and stakeholders who assembled en masse on the state's Capitol for nine days in April. Their oral accounts reflect embodied components of their participation as well as fluid, shifting, conceptions of community that both reflected and were further forged through the interactions and events. It also contributes to the sparse qualitative scholarship regarding teacher walkouts historically and regionally. Teachers rarely have time to participate in mass collective action, have access to economic power, or outlet to narrate their experiences. The witty placards, the use of social media, and the sheer numbers of participants in the Walkout were vital forms of voice for Oklahoma teachers at this historical moment - affirming their mattering on the societal level while fighting against antimattering within political levels. Teachers' absence from classrooms, with many districts pausing instruction, testifies to the mattering of their embodied presence not only for themselves but for the education collective. Gathering reflected and fueled connections to education mattering which created a greater resonance for the teachers and the public. However, as several narrators conveyed, the Walkout was *for* the students and *for* the future of education.

There were so many people

It was massive -- so crowded and packed

We worked really, really hard

Every level it was hard to hear -- deafening when we would get into chants

All the walking and standing

the lines were crazy

I walked so much I was exhausted

They thought we'd get tired and go home

Politics … one step forward, two steps back almost

My feet were so tired

But it worked. It flowed.

Holding signs - Cars honking - Singing - Chanting - Music playing - People speaking

We didn't go hungry

people brought food - palettes of water

People would bring packages of toilet paper … so we weren't a burden

People picked up after themselves

A unifying factor among people

Why would we come this far and not keep going?

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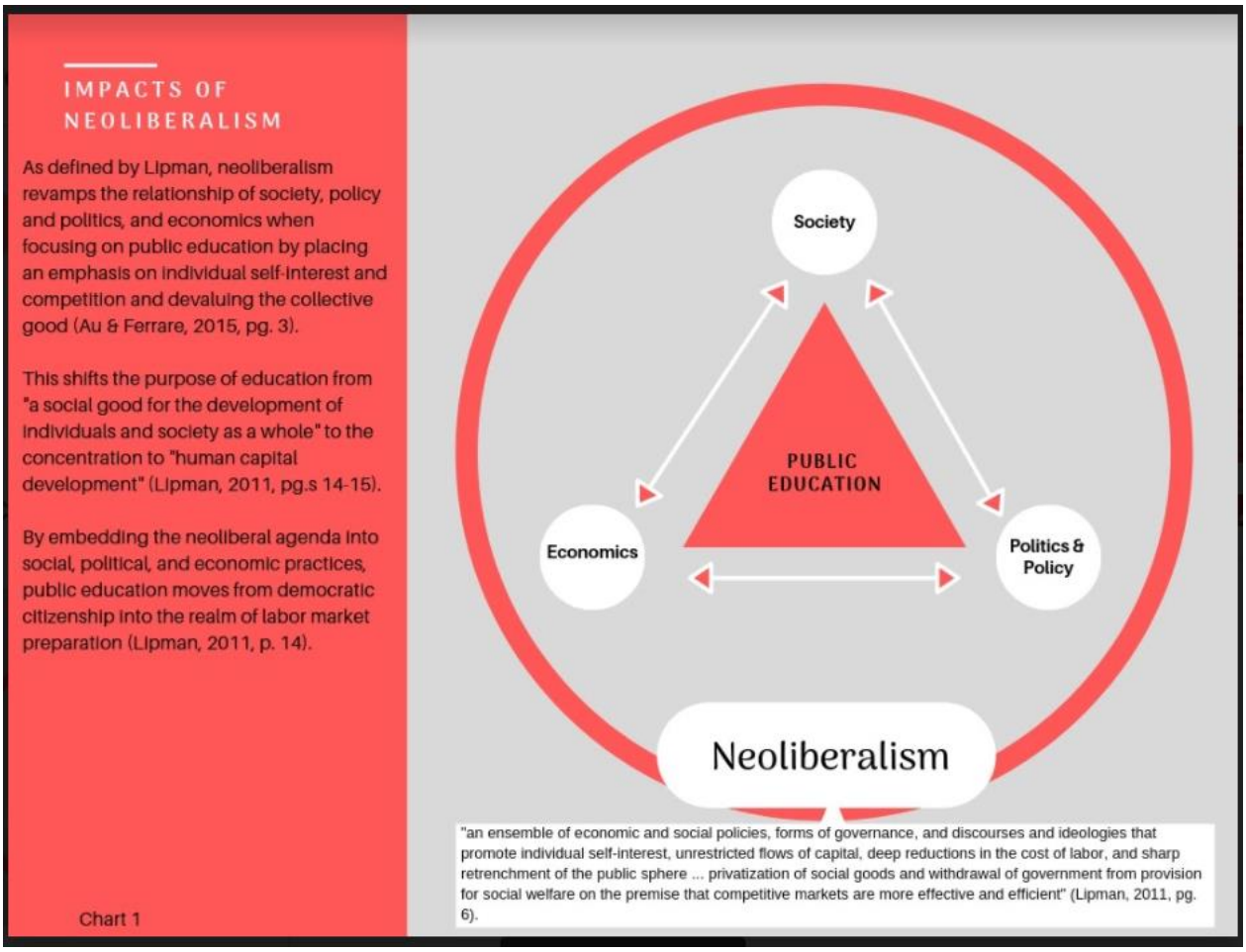
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A



APPENDIX B

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	05/22/2018
Application Number:	ED-18-67
Proposal Title:	Stories from the April 2018 Oklahoma Teacher Walkout
Principal Investigator:	Rhonda Harlow
Co-Investigator(s):	
Faculty Adviser:	Lu Bailey
Project Coordinator:	
Research Assistant(s):	
Processed as:	Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

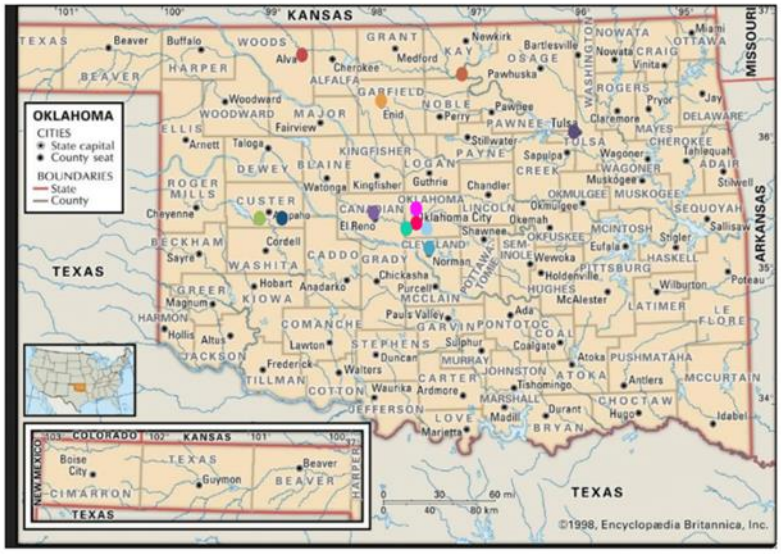
1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any unanticipated and/or adverse events to the IRB Office promptly.
4. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 223 Scott Hall (phone: 405-744-3377, irb@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Hugh Crethar, Chair Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX C



Enid 1,2,3,4,5,7,10, 19 El Reno 6 Alva 8 Clinton 9 Norman 11, 22 Weatherford 12 Ponca City 18 Edmond 21	Mid-Del OKC Yukon 13, 14 Tulsa **15, 16, 18, 20, 21**

VITA

Rhonda Harlow

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: LESSONS LEARNED FROM ORAL HISTORIES

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American Education Research Association (AERA)