Changing the Story: Implications of Narrative on Teacher Identity

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Article Information	Abstract
	This study takes a qualitative approach to understanding the connections among narrative, professional identity, and reputation management in public education. Through 15 interviews and five focus groups with high-achieving teachers and administrators, researchers explored the narratives these educators share to understand and improve the story of the teaching profession. Central to the findings are societal, organizational, and community-level factors that have led to a reputation crisis for the profession of teaching and thus contribute to the national teacher shortage. Ultimately, this study points to the notion that a shift in the perception of the value of teaching and teachers can be affected when narratives are understood and the principles of reputation management are applied. Communication interventions that provide a path forward are discussed.

Introduction

For decades, economic research has demonstrated the significant role of primary and secondary education both in terms of private earning potential and economic growth (e.g., Becker, 1964; Denison, 1962; Ozturk, 2001; Psacharopoulos & Schultz, 1984). Of central importance to these societal and economic outputs are classroom educators. Indeed, as some scholars have argued, the success of public education in the United States depends on quality elementary and secondary education teachers (Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006).

As a subsumptive profession, teaching provides the foundation for every occupation, vocation, and career. Further demonstrating the important role of teachers, the National Bureau of Economic Research has found that effective teachers lead to not only lower dropout rates, but also other key quality of life indicators including reduced risk of teen pregnancy, increased lifetime earnings, and improved career satisfaction (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011).

Despite the importance of the profession, recruitment and retention strategies have fallen short. Each year fewer high school students are pursuing education majors (American College Testing [ACT], 2015) and a decreasing number of college students pursue teaching careers (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Further, reports indicate that attrition rates of educators in their first four years of teaching are between 17 and 20 percent (Brown, 2015). This attrition has led to a shortage so dramatic that in some states classroom educators are still studying for their credentials or are training in the classroom (Rich, 2015). This shortage has been attributed to reasons as disparate as an improving economy and erosion of teaching as a stable career (Westervelt, 2015), concentration on standardized tests and related teacher evaluations focused on these test scores (Walker, 2014), and outside reforms creating stress within the profession (Moeny, 2015).

To address these issues, Teach and the Ad Council launched a public service advertising (PSA) campaign, which seeks to redefine teaching as a top career choice for talented students (Ad Council, 2013), and campaigns such as Teach Like Me use social media as a channel to redefine and professionalize the teaching profession (Sheehan, 2017). Inspired by campaigns such as these, this study empirically explores the teacher shortage issue through the lens of narrative and reputation management. First, the authors explore the narratives surrounding education as a mechanism for understanding the professional identity of teachers. Then, the authors employ reputation management to better understand how the narrative surrounding the profession might be enhanced. The findings help chart a path forward to enriched teacher identity as well as improved educator recruitment and retention.

Literature review

The concept of narrative has been defined differently by a multitude of scholars (e.g., Abbott, 2002; Foss, 1996; Onega & Landa, 1996; Prince, 1982; Scholes, 1981). Two common themes in many definitions include narrative as representation and as a sequence of events. However, Rudrum (2005) challenged these commonly held views of narrative as limiting and that "such classifications as 'narrative' and 'non-narrative' are at best provisional, inconsistent, and not mutually exclusive" (p. 200). Therefore, rather than offering a strict definition of narrative for this study, we explore the narrative paradigm and functions of narrative.

One of the most prominent understandings of narrative in communication is Fisher's (1984) narrative paradigm, which

> insists that human communication should be viewed as historical as well as situational, as
> stories competing with other stories constituted by good reasons, as being rational when

they satisfy the demands of narrative probability and narrative fidelity, and as inevitably moral inducement." (p. 2)

To understand the narrative paradigm it is important to acknowledge Fisher's notion of narrative rationality, which stands in contrast to traditional models of rationality relying on formal logic. Fisher's narrative rationality relies on narrative probability, which is a story's coherence and integrity, and narrative fidelity, which deals with how well a narrative resonates with its recipients so that they can align a given narrative with other stories they have known to be true and meaningful (Fisher, 1987). Tensions arise when larger societal narratives do not fit with an individual's lived experiences (Mumby, 1987), which is a violation of narrative fidelity.

Narratives have the ability to function both instrumentally and constitutively. They function instrumentally when responding to exigencies and manifesting arguments and persuasive appeals (Jasinski, 2001). For example, there has been much research in public relations and marketing about the instrumental use of narrative in the form of storytelling to achieve organizational goals (e.g., Gill, 2015; Papadatos, 2006; Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008). Of greater importance to this study, though, is the constitutive function of narrative that helps shape how "a community understands its world and when they offer inducements to create, recreate, or transform the social world" (Jasinski, 2001, p. 393). In this way, narratives ultimately implicate an ideology. The constitutive function of narrative is thus on a continuum with one end reinforcing the status quo and the other end challenging and subverting dominant ideological beliefs (Jasinski, 2001). Narratives can help shape individual identity as well as a community's identity and culture, even within an occupational setting. In the next section, we explore narrative and the development of a professional identity.

Narrative and professional identity

Narrative finds utility across a broad range of disciplines because of its ability to bind together the facts of our experience and organize our existence, establishing relationships between or among things over time (Fisher, 1987; Jasinski, 2001). Within public relations, Heath (2009) expanded upon this idea by writing that "narratives voice expectations regarding how organizations should act toward one another and people of society" (p. 40). Importantly, narratives also voice expectations regarding professional identities for groups such as teachers, because of their ability to reify societal values and beliefs.

Professional identity is defined as one's professional self-concept based on attitudes, beliefs, values, experiences, and motives (Ibarra, 1999; Schein, 1978). An important aspect of developing a professional self-concept comes from the socialization process and discourses provided surrounding the meanings associated with the profession—a core function of narrative (Fine, 1996; Hall, 1987). Such narrative identities are "the internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to make sense and meaning out of his or her life" (McAdams, 2011, p. 99). Relatedly, because gender identity is a cornerstone of this kind of self-conceptualization (McGowen & Hart, 1990), the narratives surrounding who can be a teacher, what a teacher does,

and leadership opportunities within school districts are often highly gendered (Dillabough, 1999). For example, women make up 76 percent of teachers and 52 percent of principals but account for less than a quarter of superintendents nationwide (Superville, 2016).

The narrative surrounding teachers often describes the profession as a calling and something people were born to do (Alsup, 2006; Chong & Low, 2009). This focus on relational and emotional reasons for joining the teaching profession often creates environments where teachers are supposed to be self-sacrificial at all times (McGowen & Hart, 1990). Professions that include a focus on caring for others, such as social work, nursing, and teaching can fall into the categorization of dirty work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Hughes, 1951). Dirty work has been defined as tasks that are "physically, socially or morally" tainted (Hughes, 1958, p. 122). Physical taint includes positions such as garbage collectors and funeral directors. Social taint occurs in positions that involve contact with stigmatized groups (e.g., prison guard, social worker) or subservient positions (e.g., maid, customer complaints). Positions such as exotic dancers or tabloid reporters are most often affiliated with moral taint. Importantly, dirtiness here is a social construction; it is not inherent in the work or the workers. We argue that teaching can be included within the class of dirty work because of its social taint as a subservient position. Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) noted that dirty work may be regarded as noble, but people "generally remain psychologically and behaviorally distanced from that work and those who do it, glad that it is someone else" (p. 416), which can be seen within reactions and responses to the teaching profession.

What is interesting, and possibly counterintuitive, about dirty work is that the stigmas associated with it often foster strong occupational and workplace cultures (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). In fact, an abundance of research has found those who perform dirty work retain high occupational self-esteem and pride (e.g., Emerson & Pollner, 1976; McIntyre, 1987; Thompson, 1991). Because of this dynamic, strong occupational group cultures often exist. However, there are inhibitors to this group formation in dirty work professions, which include "physical isolation, high turnover, and interpersonal competition for rewards" (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). The teaching profession includes each of these inhibitors to a strong group formation, seen through the prevalent myth that individual teachers can and should transform the educational system through "sheer will, dedication, and selflessness" (Steudeman, 2014, p. 477). However, this focus on individual identity as an educator may be precluding exploration into how organizations work to perpetuate this heroic teacher ideal (Steudeman, 2014), which ultimately scapegoats individual teachers and does not reflect on organizational and societal impacts on teacher success or failure.

Past research on organizations has uncovered that organizations are essentially narrative and that organizations "work hard to enact the persona that they are in charge of their destinies and aware of the interests and concerns of the other characters...in the narrative" (Heath, 1997, p. 317). Changing the organizational and societal narratives around teaching may help to address issues of burnout and retention faced in the teaching profession.

Furthermore, because of teacher shortages around the country, teachers are not only being recruited from university-based teacher education programs but also from other fields as career changers (Castro & Bauml, 2009). This recruiting of career changers is because graduates from teacher education programs often choose not to teach in high-demand fields (such as math and science) or in rural or urban school districts (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Ng, 2003; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). Research indicates that key motivating factors to consider teaching as a second career include memories of school and individual teachers, changing perspectives on life (such as having children), wanting to use specialized subject knowledge, and dissatisfaction with current careers, among others (Priyadharshini & Robinson-Pant, 2003). Given this diverse pool of prospective candidates, understanding the narratives surrounding the profession of teaching is key for recruitment efforts and tapping into why teaching is not always viewed as a viable career option.

Importantly, though, narratives are not static, meaning there is an opportunity for public relations to assist organizations' narrative enactments (Heath, 1994; Weick, 1987). Narrative is subject to temporality, or the idea that its meaning and adaptation will likely change over time (Paulus, Woodside, & Ziegler, 2007). Thus, it is important to provide individuals the opportunity to "construct a continuous self" where the past and present are connected and lead toward a particular future (Jarvinen, 2004, p. 57).

In sum, the importance of understanding the narratives surrounding the field of education cannot be understated. As Mumby (1987) wrote, "Because of their embeddedness in the everyday practice of organizations, narratives are not easily perceived as legitimating devices— they often articulate an organizational reality that is accepted as 'the natural order of things'" (pp. 113-114). It is possible that these narratives can help explain why many teachers leave the field despite feeling they are called to the profession, while others never consider the profession a possible career path despite myriad motivations to do so. Thus, to better understand the narrative surrounding the profession of teaching, the following research question is advanced:

RQ1: How, if at all, do narratives surrounding the profession of education influence teachers' professional identity?

Reputation management

Embedded narratives create and reinforce meanings both inside and outside of an organization (Marshak, Keenoy, Oswick, & Grant, 2000). Therefore, changing negative perceptions of the teaching profession requires reputation management both inside of the profession (for retention efforts) and outside of the profession (for recruitment efforts). An effective change strategy must involve the ability to determine important embedded narratives that need to be addressed, mitigated, modified, or linked to alternative narratives (Marshak et al., 2000).

Although reputation management has been studied primarily within a corporate context (e.g., Campbell, Herman, & Noble, 2006; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Murray & White, 2005),

reputation is an intangible asset affecting all types of organizations—including schools and school districts. Within the context of communication, reputation has been studied predominantly within the realm of organizational crises (e.g., Coombs, 2007; Kim & Sung, 2014; Lyon & Cameron, 2004; Sisco, 2012). However, some scholars have explored reputation in other contexts such as a country's reputation (Yang, Shin, Lee, & Wrigley, 2008). If viewing the teacher shortages across the country as a crisis, reputation management becomes an appropriate framework within which to understand efforts to change narratives of the teaching profession.

To begin to understand the role of reputation management in the context of teacher recruitment and retention, it is important to first understand the ways in which reputation has been defined and measured. In a corporate communication context, reputation has been defined as a constituencies' image of a company built up over time (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004, p. 369), or "a stakeholder's overall evaluation of a company over time" (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001, p. 25). Although some scholars question if reputation can be managed and how important reputation is for accomplishing organizational goals (Hutton, Goodman, Alexander, & Genest, 2001), others posit that reputation is central to building and sustaining market share and relationships with important publics (e.g., Black, Carnes, & Richardson, 2000; Kitchen & Laurence, 2003; Roberts & Dowling, 2002; Srivastava, McInish, Woods, & Capraro, 1997).

Although the factors involved in reputation management have evolved over time, myriad central defining elements remain. For instance, drawing attention to the importance of the interplay between internal and external reputation management, Murray and White (2005) pointed out that strong communication from organizational leaders and effective feedback loops for stakeholders are essential. Other research has highlighted factors such as recognizing the importance of key internal and external stakeholder audiences, as well as strategic communications management for effective reputation management (Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Gardberg & Fombrun, 2002a; Kiousis, Popescu, & Mitrook, 2007; Yang, 2007). In recent years, scholars interested in assessing stakeholder perceptions of relationship management have focused on six attributes of reputation including vision and leadership, social responsibility, emotional appeal, product and services, workplace environment, and financial performance (Gardberg & Fombrun, 2002b; Lee & Park 2013).

Both in terms of internal and external reputation management, the teaching field faces challenges. First, internal reputation management begins with those working within the organization to ensure that employees serve as key ambassadors (Cravens & Oliver, 2006). Next, for those outside of the profession, reputation management is central to recruitment opportunities. For states struggling with teaching shortages, a "resistance to change is often cited as a reason for difficulties in implementing and the failure of change initiatives" (Erwin & Garman, 2010, p. 39) and that the relationship to change agents, rather than the issue, is what drives the acceptance of change (Battilana & Casciaro, 2013). Externally, media narratives that teachers are underpaid, underappreciated, and overworked (Falla, 2013) negatively impact the reputation of the teaching profession. Further, successful recruitment requires effective communication to potential teachers, although the role of strategic communication is often

overlooked by the recruiters. Organizations such as the National School Public Relations Association exist to promote "comprehensive two-way communications processes involving both internal and external publics" ("Why School Public Relations?," n.d., para. 2), and encourage all school districts to hire a professional communicator to do so. Tough budget conditions may prevent a specialized public relations professional within many school districts. In those cases, school leaders (such as principals, administrators, and respected teachers) can play an important role in reputation management for the profession (Kowalski, 2011).

To better understand the potential role of reputation management in shifting perceptions of the teaching profession, the following research question is posed. It is anticipated that the findings will aid school and district level leaders to focus their efforts and affect positive change both internally and externally.

RQ2: How, if at all, can improving the fit between the societal teaching narrative and teacher's lived experiences help improve the reputation of the profession?

Method

Data collection & analysis

Data were collected through a combination of focus groups and interviews to discover how teachers and members of the education community develop personal narratives and/or interact with and understand organizational and societal narratives about teaching and the teaching profession. Focus groups allowed for narratives to build upon and off of one another; interviews allowed for in-depth understanding and processing of one person's narrative experience (Berg, 2009). Focus groups took place in the state where the research was based; interviews were with individuals from different states in a variety of regions around the country (see Table 1). Information was triangulated across data sources. Multiple researchers read and analyzed the same transcripts and found that information found in the focus groups also was reflected in the interview responses (Patton, 2002). Overall, five focus groups and 15 interviews were conducted, with 21 men and 28 women participating. Participants included 23 teachers (most of whom had achieved Teacher of the Year[1] status in their specific state), eight superintendents, six principals, four union and political leaders, and eight business/PTA leaders and leadership from universities with master's programs in teaching. The research received IRB approval before beginning.

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[1] Teacher of the Year is a prestigious national honor that focuses on excellence in teaching in the United States.

Table 1. States and regions where research was conducted

Regional Division	States Included in Study
South Atlantic	Georgia, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia
East North Central	Michigan
East South Central	Kentucky, Tennessee
Pacific West	California
West South Central	Texas
Western Mountain	Arizona, Idaho
West North Central	Iowa, Nebraska

Focus groups

In June 2016, five focus groups were conducted, one with each of the following groups: union and political leaders and the business community; leadership from universities with colleges offering master's programs in teaching; teachers; principals; and superintendents. Participants were identified as experts on the public school system by Department of Education leadership in the state where the research was being conducted. The size of these groups ranged from four to nine participants.

Each focus group was conducted by an experienced moderator familiar with the topic who used a semi-structured guide. To better understand the narrative that educators use to describe themselves and the profession, questions included motivators and deterrents for entering the profession of teaching, reasons for low retention rates, effective recruitment and retention initiatives, as well as insight on common school-, district- and state-based retention programs such as teacher appreciation, evaluation, and mentorship. Each focus group lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was recorded and fully transcribed.

In-depth interviews

From July to September 2016, 15 in-depth interviews were conducted by phone with education stakeholders in geographically dispersed states. Participants were selected because they represented their state as a State Teacher of the Year and, therefore, were thought to be experts and familiar with crafting and negotiating teacher identity (Beabout & Carr-Chellman, 2007). These individuals, because of their top-teacher status, served as role models for their colleagues, advocates for their communities, and leaders in education in the state where they reside. Each individual was contacted by telephone or email with a request to participate in this research. Interviews were conducted by a graduate student who had been trained by the researchers and was familiar with the topics and ideas being discussed.

In-depth interviews followed a semi-structured protocol with items mirroring those asked during the focus groups. Based on initial focus group analysis, additional questions were

included to understand the relationship between teachers and administrators in decision making as well as teacher leadership. These questions shed additional light on the role of communication in understanding narrative surrounding the profession of teaching. The interviews each proceeded with the understanding that as topics emerged they would be explored and exhausted. Interviews lasted an average of 40 to 60 minutes. Each interview was recorded and transcribed.

Analysis

Content analysis strategies spearheaded by Corbin and Strauss (2008) were utilized, as the discussion of narrative fits well within their belief that knowledge is socially constructed and the importance of the narrative that occurs as knowledge is passed among persons (Kvale, 1995). Open coding was completed by the team of researchers with frequent meetings to discuss progress, ideas, and to compare new or emergent themes and to determine consistency across the large number of data sources (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). These ongoing meetings, discussion, and collaboration on codes throughout the coding process were used as the test of intercoder reliability.

Reflexivity

While none of the researchers is a K-12 educator, the researchers are college professors, familiar with the rhythms and unique predicaments of being in charge of a classroom. This experience did come into play when reading through the transcripts and engaging in coding and discussion. Personal experiences and identification with the narratives being told allowed the researchers to delve deeper into the information being presented and to be more familiar and in tune with how certain connections or findings might be relevant and worth discussing.

Findings

To protect the respondents' identities, while also demonstrating similarities in responses across geography, the authors only identify participants by the U.S. Census Bureau's region where they reside.

RQ1: How, if at all, do narratives surrounding the profession of education influence teachers' professional identity?

In response to the first research question, which explores the implications of how narratives surround teacher identity, themes included *dirty work,* the view of the *education system as a*

complete failure, a *culture of fear*, *positive experiences in the classroom*, and *teaching as a calling.*

Dirty work

The narratives surrounding the profession of education are often negative, particularly as they relate to what it takes to do the job of teaching. As one focus group participant said, "I mean, the rhetoric that's out there is just like anybody can do this job, and we don't need educators in the classroom. We just need educated people in the classroom, which is different." This lack of discussion of teaching as a skilled profession, in comparison to fields such as medicine or law, contributes to this negative narrative of what it takes to be a teacher. As one educator from the West North Central region said, "I think part of it is an image problem, right? I think teaching is under professionalized and overly martyrized."

The specific skills required to be an effective educator are often downplayed. The following exchange between two teachers during a focus group gets at this experience:

PARTICIPANT A: It seems though that our legislature has a little bit too much power when it comes to education. These are just everyday people from all sorts of the walks of life without a lot of background in the area.

PARTICIPANT B: But they were all students. That's their answer. "We've been in a classroom."

Other interview respondents lamented the common narrative that "teachers only work until 3 and they get the summer off," or that students who could "do anything" are encouraged away from the profession, "like teaching is beneath you because you're so smart." As one educator from the Western Mountain region stated, "What the media are doing to the teaching profession, I don't know anyone who would want to become a teacher the way they treat us. It's like we are gutter garbage."

Education system as a complete failure

In addition to the narratives that devalue teachers, participants in the focus group taking place in the South Atlantic indicated media promote a "belief that our education system is a complete failure." Similarly, another teacher said, "I think the society as a whole is kind of [negative], and the media have beat up on education so much that it just becomes less and less attractive to go into an occupation that everybody's complaining [about]." Because these media messages are being consumed by parents and other members of the community, as one educator said, "When you talk to parents about the education system in the United States, the data show that most people think that the education system in the United States is broken."

Culture of fear

Because of this narrative of the education system as broken, education remains a highly politicized issue. Teachers saw this as "an easy thing for political candidates to beat up on, how I'm going to be the education [candidate]—I'm going to fix education, but it, you know, just seems to turn." Consequently, the education system becomes focused on accountability and punishing teachers for the failures of students. As one teacher said, there is a "culture of fear for teachers and this culture of fear for administrators at the district and school level." In addition to this culture of fear created, content standards and education policies are in continual flux because of political expediency. Rather than supporting this culture of changing expectations for teachers, "We should be taking the content standards and helping teachers learn how to develop lessons based on the new standards, as opposed to let's just keep changing the standards."

This narrative of teaching as a rigid and test-driven environment may be driving away "some super creative and intelligent people [who] don't want to work in that sort of environment." This rigidity leads to feelings of disempowerment as "the teacher's creativity and ability to make instructional decisions is hampered because teachers are compelled to, sort of, teach to the test because they're believed to increase test results."

Positive experiences in the classroom

Although some of the broader societal narratives were seen as negative, often the narrative identities that teachers had for themselves were positive because they were formed through the educational experiences that they had. As one educator noted, a strong motivator to becoming a teacher "is having a great classroom experience. Having great teachers who do have that passion."

This episodic rather than thematic framing of the education narrative created more opportunities for teacher empowerment. As one educator said:

I never saw the whole education picture, but, see, there are people who see the whole picture because they're creating it and framing it, but as an educator, I was just seeing a small piece, and I said, what would happen if every educator got to know what I just saw and heard.

Other educators recognized the disconnect between the larger media narrative of education and their personal experiences in the classroom. As one teacher said, "Sometimes the news wants to gravitate toward negative stories about what's going on in our schools. So, we try to share the positive things that are going on in the classroom to help with the image of the profession."

Teaching as a calling

For many educators, the narrative existed that they were born to teach, with an accompanying innate desire or ability. An educator from the South Atlantic said most teachers "see education as a calling," where although it might be "hard to quantify what kind of impact that has. . . we want people to feel valued and feel like their hard work makes a difference." Because of that calling, some of the teachers were willing to overlook some of the deterrents they faced—one West Mountain teacher noted that "for me, teaching's a calling, and if teaching is a calling for you, then you will go wherever you're called." Another from the South Atlantic said that "I am a

teacher because it is a calling. I am here because I love what I do. I'm not here for the money." In many ways, these narratives focus on the fulfillment offered from the job as its own form of currency rather than material benefits. As another teacher said, "I have never felt more fulfilled in my life, and, I mean—and I love what I'm doing, and I see the impact every day in my students."

RQ2: How, if at all, can improving the fit between the societal teaching narrative and teachers' lived experiences help improve the reputation of the profession?

In response to the second research question, four factors emerged related to creating an environment within and surrounding educational institutions that can provide a foundation for reputation management to take place. These factors were *shared vision*, *collaborative work culture, sense of community,* and *union/political involvement.*

Shared vision

Reputation offers a way of building narrative through a shared vision among the diverse publics involved in education—teachers and administrators, but also parents and the political and union members who were included in this research. One participant explained that "what teachers want also is to have a better voice in making decisions," to help improve the reputation of their field to others. Additionally, as one teacher in the South Atlantic articulated, they wanted to know if their organizations were "emotionally safe place[s] to be, you know, can you really speak your mind, do you really feel like you're contributing, and I think that's a big part of making a safe working environment where people are committed, people are engaged." Contributing to a shared vision, which includes feeling listened to, empowers teachers to see the vision they helped develop come to fruition.

Another way to see vision interact with reputation is by giving teachers direct access to decision-making bodies. One teacher in a South Atlantic state discussed their school improvement team, which consisted of two principals, eight teachers, and four parents. This body was important because "pretty much most major decisions about our school have to go through the school improvement team. . . so that's another area where teachers have an ability to have a say." These sorts of teams can be ways to improve the relationships with important publics, such as parents, and allow all individuals to feel heard and respected.

The idea of "teacher leaders" also emerged across interviews. Rather than strictly administrative positions being the only advancement opportunity for teachers, teacher leaders would still be in the classroom but have some of their time freed up to:

> Take some of those leadership responsibilities in concert with the principal to mentor other teachers or to have some of the, you know, lead the faculty senate or some who design professional development or other things that teachers can do.

This arrangement also would allow teacher leaders to act as change agents who can have an impact on reputation. However, it is important to incentivize the role of teacher leader because

one participant noted that "for some teachers who have the potential to be that teacher leader, they're asking, 'What's in it for me?'"

Collaborative work culture

In addition to having a trusting relationship with administration, teachers also discussed the importance of having time to collaborate with each other. For reputation to improve, organizations must create opportunities for teachers to collaborate and build relationships in a way that is not simply added on top of their other responsibilities. One focus group participant noted that "you have to change the dynamic and the value that is placed on what teachers have. I know we complain about collaboration because it does take away prep time, it does, but if they would build time into schedules to allow us to still keep our prep times, [collaboration could work]." Another participant noted formal meetings that the teachers in their school had once a month to go over teaching standards and other relevant issues, which contributed to positive internal relationships and retention.

Beyond needing collaborative meeting spaces and times, many teachers mentioned either being mentored or mentoring others informally because the benefits were clear in terms of inducting new teachers into the profession and helping with retention efforts. Participants discussed the importance of mentors to help create an environment to both recruit new teachers and for those newer teachers to learn and grow. One participant described the importance of mentoring in the following way:

> Most new teachers, if available, will latch onto somebody close by and in their particular school and ask for help usually, but a lot of the mentoring programs that I'm seeing anyway are targeting much more specific and more organized—in more organized ways to get this— because we see that when mentoring is available and [it is] the right type of mentoring, teachers stay.

Reputation also is based at least partially on the idea of effective feedback, the evaluation or assessment of teaching, or perhaps how to alter that model for additional effectiveness. One participant from the West North Central area explained that "the mentor's role is never evaluation. It's never assessment. It's always support. It's always encouragement. It's always as a resource person. It's always as a—let me know what I can do to help you." Another participant from the South Atlantic described the role of a mentor as:

> More of a coach who's not there to pamper you and make you feel like everything is sunshine and unicorns, but they're there to support your growth as a teacher rather than to evaluate you and punish you if you do something wrong.

Participants mentioned several examples of how mentoring can be better integrated into organizations and made more robust, including having teachers who only teach for part of the day and spend the other part of the day in a mentoring role or employing newly retired teachers as mentors. This approach was deemed as important for teachers who may be struggling in order to "provide community and to provide a professional kind of support for them."

Sense of community

Developing a sense of community through narrative, relationship building, and reputation management was considered vital for teacher retention efforts. One participant said that "the only way that you can get them to stay here is to tie them to the community, make them feel welcomed, like they're a part of this place, and that comes—that comes down to the appreciation factor."

For school districts located in rural communities, creating a broader sense of community not only helped support current teachers but created an environment to recruit "homegrown teachers" to their districts as a way to "help plant the seeds for future teachers." One participant said of the county they teach in that "we grow our own there," meaning that "the kids I taught are now teaching" in that same area. States with large rural areas can capitalize on that sense of community "because it's home. . . A lot of people who've moved away would rather be here. We've known that for a while." As one participant not originally from a rural area, but now teaching in one, said, "I just felt like I belonged here. I still feel like I belong here." That narrative of belonging within a community was vital for teachers to want to stay both in the profession and in communities experiencing teacher shortages and for improved reputation for teachers within the community as a whole.

Union/political involvement

Teachers also wanted this supportive environment and positive reputation for teaching to extend to legislators, which inspired many teachers to become active within their local teaching unions or other forms of political involvement. Involvement with local unions allowed teachers to act as change agents, providing narratives that addressed the structural challenges that created difficulties in the individual classroom environment. One participant from the West North Central area noted the importance of "recognizing the structural challenges that teachers have to deal with. Teachers aren't to blame for failing or for kids who aren't ready. Kids aren't professionals, and they don't need standards."

Another participant discussed the changes they were able to make at the state level when "the teachers started off going to union meetings developing kind of a list of concerns together." In developing this list of concerns, the teachers realized there were structural issues at the state level causing issues. They then were able to sit down and meet with the commissioner of education in their state and establish things to work on collaboratively. This participant explained:

> I think one of the major things that's gone a really long way to make teachers feel appreciated is offering them a seat at the table to talk with somebody like the commissioner of education of the state to try and resolve what they thought were pretty substantial problems. . .So, I think another tool is just that there's an implicit understanding in this state that they care about teacher voice.

Discussion

The primary aims of this study were to better understand the influence of narratives on classroom teachers' professional identity and the factors that would lead to an environment that was conducive for reputation management for the field. Undergirding the importance of this research is the significant role that teachers play in society paired with an ever-increasing teacher shortage in the United States. Findings from this line of inquiry highlight key factors at the societal-, organizational- and community-level that influence the professional identity of classroom educators. Employing the lens of reputation management, these findings then highlight key focal areas for improving the narrative surrounding the profession and thus potentially impacting retention and recruitment efforts. Table 2 clarifies these focal areas as both needs and actions for public relations professionals or efforts within a school or district.

Table 2. Practical applications for influencing teachers' professional identity

Need	**Action**
Improve legislative support and resource allocation	Continuous public image campaign focused on required training and professionalization of field
Encourage a community of colleagues	Engage teachers in vision creation and execution for the school; improve teacher participation in decision making; improve internal communication between teachers and administrators
Feel connected to local community	Communicating teacher/school success into the community; local media coverage of success; empower educators to share via social media

Societal-level factors and actions

A key finding in this line of inquiry relates to societal narratives that marginalize classroom educators and the teaching profession. Two main sources that perpetuate these disparaging narratives are policy-makers and mass media. First, adding to perceived negative public perceptions, teachers internalize a lack of legislative support and diminishing resource allocation, burgeoning responsibilities that are beyond the scope of teaching, and a lack of voice in decision-making processes as synonymous with a message that teaching is not a respected or valued profession. Highlighting the gravitas of this situation, in early 2018 public schools in all 55 districts of West Virginia were closed for 10 days when educators and school personnel went on strike in response to low pay and legislation affording three years of only minimal pay increases and a freeze at the current level for premiums for 16 months (Larimer, 2018). Although this

scenario highlights one approach for impacting change, a report from the U.S. Department of Education (2013) indicates that for true transformation in the field to occur, teachers must be treated as professionals with demanding and complex jobs.

Findings also indicated that disparaging societal-level narratives were spread through mass media. To illustrate, as educators in this study pointed out, media narratives often focus on failures in the education system. Constant coverage of these failures was internalized as decreased feelings of worth and diminished job satisfaction. This dynamic is not surprising as agenda-setting and framing research has consistently demonstrated the role of mass media messaging in the construction of social realities (for a review see Hallahan, 1999; McComas & Shaw, 1993). Further, in classifying dirty work occupations, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) argued that no profession retains a relatively high occupational prestige with a servile relationship taint. We argue that media coverage that fails to highlight the successes of classroom educators reinforces this servile relationship by disempowering teachers and contributing to the social taint of the profession as dirty work.

Although not a comprehensive solution to the national teacher shortage, based on these findings, it seems the profession would benefit from a rebranding and public image campaign. This public outreach effort should not only aim to recruit teachers for the profession but also focus on elevating the field in media coverage and educating policy makers. In other words, this effort should improve reputation management by targeting decision makers, potential future educators, and communities with key information about teacher successes. Further, campaign messaging should not just focus on making a difference in the life of students but also on the required training and high level of professionalization of the field. One example of how this might be replicated in communities facing a teacher shortage is the TEACH campaign that promotes resources for certification requirements and teaching preparation programs for those looking to change professions (TEACH, n.d.).

Organization-level factors and actions

As with any career, teachers want both to be respected and to feel like they are part of a community of colleagues. Further, narratives, and thus identities, are not meant to be static. As time changes, public opinion is swayed. Thus, at the organization level, teachers want to share in the vision creation and execution for moving the school forward. They also want to work in a collaborative environment where resource sharing and mentorship are supported. Teachers want to have their voices heard, to participate in decision making, and to be informed of changes that will affect them. Therefore, another prong in the public relations approach to improving the narratives and reputation of teaching includes opening channels of communication to create a supportive culture where teachers can flourish. This finding is supported by public relations scholarship that identifies listening as fundamental for ethical public communication (Macnamara, 2016) and research indicating listening is a predictor of increased employee retention and productivity (Benner & Tushman, 2003).

Further, improved communication among stakeholders and a greater role in collaboration with leadership would lead to improved teaching environments. Findings indicated that teachers want to be part of a supportive environment of like-minded educators who advocate for larger changes together. Being part of a group advocating for change removes many of the perceived constraints associated with the issues appearing dauntingly large. Having their voices heard at the highest level makes teachers feel empowered. These findings complement relationship management scholarship that indicates factors such as open communication and effective internal relations management (Yang, 2007), as well as vision and leadership and workplace environment (Lee & Park, 2013), are key attributes for reputation management. Thus, a focus on improved internal communications may help to shift the narratives that influence the professional identity of the teaching profession. This increased impact on narrative and reputation management is also central to the issue of recruitment. Strong professional identity (and not for dirty work), community support, and the chance to advocate for larger change make the reputation of the entire field more positive, and thus more enticing, to those looking to enter the workforce or make a career change.

Community-level factors and action

At the community level, teachers who feel rooted in their local community are more likely to stay and be happier in their profession. This sense of community may come from returning to their childhood home to teach or feeling a sense of belonging in the community of residence. Further, communicating school, classroom, and teacher successes into the community reduces stigma and offers educators a renewed sense of dignity and pride in the communities where they reside. For example, local media coverage highlighting positive educator successes and support from local businesses would celebrate the teaching profession and help provide further narrative fidelity (Fisher, 1987) to teachers' lived experiences. For example, local and regional replication of the Teach Like Me program may empower educators to share their own stories via social media.

Conclusion

This study takes a qualitative approach to understanding the connections among narrative, professional identity, and reputation management in the field of public education. Central to the findings are the factors that have led to a reputation crisis for the profession of teaching and thus contributed to the national teacher shortage. Although much research in public education focuses on program, policy, or national level change, this report instead focuses on the role of communication in addressing the teacher shortage. Key findings indicate that public education would benefit from societal, organizational, and community-level communication interventions.

Although the Ad Council and TEACH campaign was a start, the inspiring narratives of teachers changing students' lives in these PSAs is often at odds with teachers' everyday lived experiences in the classroom. Offering success stories and positive images of classroom teachers may help to recruit new teachers, but to retain teachers the internal organizational narratives and external societal narratives surrounding the teaching profession also must begin to shift.

All of the teachers who participated in this study referenced their desire to be heard, respected, appreciated, and consulted in the decision-making process. At the school level, creating a culture of open communication, collaborative opportunities, and shared vision will invest educators in both the profession and the outcomes. Assuring this inclusive culture may help to restore some of the former dignity to the profession and create a community of colleagues who lifts one another up in pursuit of shared aims. Although it is understood that a communication approach will not end the teacher shortage, it is believed to be the foundation for a shift in the perception of the value of teaching and teachers. Ultimately, this study points to the notion that increasing retention and recruitment can be affected when narratives are understood and the principles of reputation management are applied.

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