The Fessler and Christensen (1992) teacher career cycle model provides the theoretical framework for this case study incorporating a narrative design nested within a larger research project examining six teachers’ journey across the career cycle (Woods & Earls, 1995; Woods & Lynn, 2001). The current case study sought to gain a greater understanding of why one teacher, Patsy, was unable to negotiate environmental hurdles that are commonplace in physical education and how these factors were being negotiated as a classroom teacher. Data sources included: seven interviews with the participant, multiple interviews with her principals, spouse, and three former university teacher educators, field notes from live lesson observations, and related documents. An interpretative framework was used to understand the perceptions and meanings Patsy gave to her experiences and revealed that she reported being both positively and negatively affected by most of the personal and organizational environmental factors in the teacher career cycle model. Viewing Patsy’s teaching career through the lens of the career cycle provides insight into areas of change necessary to motivate and retain quality physical education teachers.

Keywords: teaching, physical education
The ability to negotiate the personal and organizational challenges and changes that take place during the course of a teacher’s career may affect career longevity. Also affected are motivations toward sustained enthusiasm and pursuit of innovative teaching methods, as opposed to simply “doing the job” out of frustration derived from negative feelings about the system. Teachers who feel they can make a difference, both within their students and within the system, are more likely to maintain their commitment to teaching despite occasional setbacks (Henninger, 2007). A better understanding of what takes place between the initial and later years of teaching is needed to assist teachers in anticipating and negotiating the personal and organizational challenges throughout the entire career cycle. This study attempts to expand this limited research.

Teacher change research establishes that teachers develop differently and have individual attitudes, knowledge, skills, behaviors, and self-efficacy levels at various points during their careers (Burden, 1982; Burke, Greenglass, & Schwarzer, 1996; Fessler, 1992; Henninger, 2007; Sparkes & Templin, 1990; Super, 1994). The literature suggests that the nature of a teacher’s development may be influenced by a variety of factors and conditions across her/his career. Understanding a teacher’s ability to adjust to different situations, while increasing competence and motivation in the face of adverse conditions and marginalized feelings is needed. (Gordon & Coscarelli, 1996; Moreira et al., 2002; Sparkes & Templin, 1990).

Numerous researchers have identified stages of teacher development (Fessler, 1995; Fessler & Christensen, 1992; Huberman, 1989; Singer & Willett, 1996; Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, & Enz, 2000). Fessler and Christensen (1992) documented the interaction between professional career stages and organizational and personal environments that include numerous interactive yet identifiable facets and influence movement between and placement within one’s career cycle stages (Figure 1). The Fessler and Christensen (1992) model provides a framework for this study because it facilitates an understanding of career change over the entire career of individual teachers. Many investigations fail to adequately pursue understanding of variations in individual teachers’ careers (Casey, 1995–1996; Fessler, 1995; Fessler & Christensen, 1992; Huberman, 1989; Singer & Willett, 1996). It remains unclear why some teachers are able to successfully negotiate hurdles in their personal and organizational environments, while others who experience similar contextual factors fail to navigate their career paths in a positive direction. Even though these studies paint sketches of reasonable predictions about teachers’ careers, the investigators acknowledge that individual teacher variation exists within each model. Further, they offer little explanation of how individual teachers negotiate changes over the span of an entire career.

Other studies focused on the relationship between biography, life, professional experience, critical incidents, and learning to teach or changing practices, particularly addressing the individual and the contextualized nature of individual teacher stories (Alsup, 2006; Johnson, 2007; Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994). Narrative research using life stories and history, interviews, documents, and observation provides an opportunity to enhance generalized quantitative demographic data in an effort to better understand teacher change and development (Cheung, 2005; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Casey, 1995–1996).

Fessler and Christensen’s (1992) model proposes that a nurturing, supportive and reinforcing environment can assist a teacher in pursuing a rewarding, positive
career progression. Alternatively, a negative environmental atmosphere can have adverse effects on a teacher’s career path. The tenets of the teacher career cycle model propose that teachers’ careers are cyclical flowing from preservice through career exit and are affected by numerous elements in both their personal and organizational environments. Family, cumulative life experiences, crises, availability of avocational outlets, positive critical incidents, and the teacher’s individual disposition provide personal environment conditions influencing career decisions. The effect of societal expectations, public trust, regulations, management style, professional organizations, and unions comprise the model’s organizational environment influences affecting career choices. Using this model to identify the assorted personal and organizational environmental variables teachers negotiate throughout their careers, these researchers advocate for more personalized approaches to professional development.

The Fessler and Christensen (1992) teacher career cycle model provides the theoretical framework for this case study incorporating a narrative design nested within a larger research project examining six teacher’s journey across the career cycle (Woods & Earls, 1995; Woods & Lynn, 2001). The current case study sought
to gain a greater understanding of why one teacher, Patsy, was unable to negotiate environmental hurdles that are commonplace in physical education and how these factors were being negotiated as a classroom teacher. Three research questions focused this study:

a) What career stages has the participant experienced during her twenty-two-year career?

b) What factors led to the participant’s career transition from physical education teacher to third grade teacher?

c) How have these factors been negotiated as a third grade teacher?

Method

Selection of Participant

This study involved a teacher whose early career cycle was described in two previous research studies (Woods & Earls, 1995; Woods & Lynn, 2001). In the current study, Patsy (a pseudonym) is a 43-year-old Euro-American female who is in her twenty-second year as a teacher; years 1–6 as a Physical Education (PE) teacher and years 7–22 as a third grade teacher (See Table 1).

Table 1  Patsy’s Career Path

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1987–1988</td>
<td>PE Teacher</td>
<td>Elementary, High socioeconomic status (SES), replaced a teacher who retired after 40 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988–1993</td>
<td>PE Teacher</td>
<td>Elementary, Title I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993–2008</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Elementary, Title I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008–2009</td>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>Elementary, High socioeconomic status (SES), Newly built school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Sources

Multiple narrative research data sources were used in this study: (a) transcripts of the primary participant’s responses in seven semistructured interviews conducted in 1989, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2006, and 2008 that focused on sustaining and inhibiting career path factors, teaching dispositions, and a comparison of teaching physical education and classroom teaching; (b) two formal interviews with the participant’s principals (current and former), two formal interviews with her spouse, two formal interviews with each of three former university teacher educators, and multiple informal interviews with the participant, the participant’s spouse and teacher educators; (c) documents, including National Board Certification materials; and (d) field notes from live classroom observations on the day of each interview, with the exception of the year 2008 interview. The researchers jointly conducted formal semistructured interviews lasting two to three hours with Patsy. Open-response questions were used to elicit data, and an interview guide was

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used to structure the formal interview process. The same procedures were used in interviews with Patsy’s principals, spouse, and university teacher educators. These 60- to 90-min interviews were conducted and tape-recorded in the participants’ respective school settings. All interviews were later transcribed verbatim.

**Data Analysis**

An interpretative framework was used to assess the perceptions and meanings Patsy gave to experiences that led to and followed her career transition from physical education to third grade. Inductive analysis was used to analyze the interview transcripts, National Board Certification documents, and videotaped lessons to determine the factors that enhanced and constrained the participant’s progress as both a physical education and a third grade teacher (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Using constant comparative analysis the researchers looked for recurrent themes or regularities that became categories for focus throughout the collection and analysis. Five themes emerged: (1) the importance of teaching the “whole child,” (2) accountability equals worthiness, (3) need for novelty in lessons, (4) desire for colleagues’ respect and recognition, and (5) teaching PE as a strong foundation for classroom teaching. Multiple techniques that enhance credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability were used to ensure methodological rigor, thus establishing trustworthiness of constructivist inquiry: (a) an audit trail, specifying the steps involved in the methodological procedures followed in the study; (b) cross-checking multiple data sources for consistency to locate negative cases that could challenge emerging themes; (c) a rich description of the site, participants, and procedures; (d) member-checking, by providing the primary participant with a copy of the manuscript and asking for feedback on content and accuracy; and (e) researchers working as a team increasing the findings’ credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These techniques were used to assess the research for truth, value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Results**

Patsy, a 43-year-old Euro-American female, is in her twenty-second year of teaching and is currently a third grade teacher. The first six years of her teaching career were spent as an elementary physical education specialist. Patsy has moved from one career stage to another in response to various factors in her personal and organizational environment throughout her 22-year professional journey. She provided verification of her perceived progression through the career stages, and in all cases her perception was consistent with the stages identified by the researchers. In the last report on Patsy’s career path she had moved from the induction phase of her role as a third grade teacher into competency building (Woods & Lynn, 2001; See Table 2). Since that time, she has continued along her path as a grade three teacher, moving through the enthusiastic and growing stage—where she was recognized as a National Board Certified Middle Child Generalist—into career frustration after the birth of her daughter, before settling into a career stability stage, followed by a transition back to the enthusiastic and growing stage. These results will report the factors that led to and followed Patsy’s career through her years as a physical education teacher and her transition to third grade.
Table 2  Environmental Influences Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Stage</th>
<th>Environmental Domain</th>
<th>Key Environmental Influences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preservice</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Individual Disposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Family, Societal Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency Building</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Positive Critical Incidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Frustration</td>
<td>Personal, Organizational</td>
<td>Individual Disposition, Societal Expectations, School Regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Wind Down &amp; Pre-Service</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Positive Critical Incidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induction</td>
<td>Personal, Organizational</td>
<td>Cumulative Life Experiences, Individual Disposition, Societal Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency Building</td>
<td>Organizational, Personal</td>
<td>Public Trust, Societal Expectations, School Regulations, Individual Disposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiastic &amp; Growing</td>
<td>Personal, Organizational</td>
<td>Positive Critical Incidents, Societal Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Frustration</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Avocational, Family, Crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Stability</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiastic &amp; Growing</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Positive Critical Incidents, Family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Career Stages

Preservice Stage

At eighteen, Patsy entered the *preservice stage*—that period of time in which an individual is enrolled in a teacher certification program in a college or university—and remained in this stage for five years. Self-described as a “sorry” student for the first two years of college, Patsy explained that by the time she took her physical education courses she was a serious learner, “I didn’t take school seriously, . . . . Then I realized if I don’t start working I am never going to get out of here [university]. I started working real hard” (1989, p. 114, l. 6–10). Patsy’s *individual disposition* toward being a serious learner and a hard worker in the later years of her preservice preparation lead to positive assessments by her teacher educators and built her confidence as a beginning teacher.

Dr. Duke, one of her teacher educators in the latter three years, described Patsy as “deceptively bright, definitely committed, and probably in tune with the elementary level” (1989, p. 114, l. 28–29). Another teacher educator, Dr. Waters, said Patsy was, “strong cognitively and nearly as strong on her feet” (1989, p. 114,
p. 19–20). Patsy and her teacher educators reported that she embraced the belief system promoted by the teacher education program while in the preservice stage. Patsy stated that she had a successful student teaching experience, indicating that she was ready for a job of her own, saying, “I thought I was better than one of the people I was working under” (1989, p 116, l. 6–7). As Patsy moved out of the preservice stage she held her teacher preparation program in high regard, affirming that it provided an “excellent” education (1989, p 133, 13). Viewing herself as quite well prepared, she transitioned into the induction stage.

**Induction Stage**

After graduation, Patsy accepted a position as the only full-time elementary physical educator at a school of approximately 800 students, about 100 miles from her hometown and the university from which she graduated. An effective, but admittedly arrogant teacher, Patsy reflects years later that she “lacked understanding of the other factors that affect teacher frustration and mediocre student achievement” (2006, p.115, l. 4–5). Patsy soon recognized that full-time teaching was more difficult than student teaching had been.

Patsy married Everett, another physical educator, during the summer after her first year of teaching, resulting in positive familial influence in her personal environment. Relocating to her hometown, Patsy accepted a position as an itinerant teacher at two urban elementary schools where over 90% of students at each school were in free- or reduced-lunch programs. Patsy understood their circumstances and was sensitive to her students’ needs, “They come before school and after school to work with me. They know I’m serious with them from my heart” (1989, p. 120, l. 9–10). Becoming more realistic about the challenges and demands of teaching, Patsy said that the dealing with parents, coping with extraschool responsibilities, and adjusting to life in a new city made her induction into the field more complex and arduous than expected. These societal expectations in Patsy’s organizational environment were taxing, with a potential negative effect on her career development.

**Competency Building Stage**

In her second year of teaching, Patsy began taking graduate courses to become a clinical teacher for the teacher education program from which she had recently graduated. She also accepted a student teacher and began to mentor clinical students. Patsy spoke fondly of her second year, “It was a pretty good year for me, and I was pretty much into what I was doing” (2000, p. 13, l. 21). Taken together, the graduate study and mentoring responsibilities represent positive critical incidents in Patsy’s personal environment. These steps taken so early in her career speak to her confidence and intention to become a contributing professional. Further, in her quest for professional development, Patsy attended the state professional conference and was a member of the state and national physical education organizations. Inspired because she was making a difference in her student’s motor skills, Patsy reported, “That’s like a motivational thing that keeps me going; it is knowing that they are improving, because gosh, if their skills weren’t improving or getting better, I’d quit” (1989, p. 128, l. 28–30).
Career Frustration Stage

After a brief period of competency building, Patsy became disillusioned with teaching physical education, “I knew after my second year of teaching PE it was losing its meaning to me” (1996, p. 3, l. 6). Patsy explained how disenchantment with the profession led her to allow students to stay on task longer than she believed to be appropriate, “They would stay right on task. So, I was happy and they were happy. I really should have gone on to something else” (1989, p. 128, l. 6–8). In the 2000 interview, Patsy reflected back to her earlier years, “Not that it was all that bad. I mean I certainly was teaching” (2000, p. 13, l. 35). Patsy also described concerns about her colleagues’ perceptions, expressing a desire to feel appreciated and respected something she did not feel as a physical educator. Reaching an all time job satisfaction low, Patsy began to consider the possibility of pursuing a new career as a classroom teacher.

Movement into the career frustration stage can be connected to key components in both the personal and organizational environments. First, within the organizational environment, school regulations pertaining to her teaching schedule proved incompatible with her teaching goals. Elementary PE teachers typically teach all students in the school. As an itinerant PE teacher between two schools, Patsy not only taught all the children in one school, but all the children in two schools—having to haul equipment from one school to another. She did not feel that she had a home base, and her principal, Dr. Pearl, acknowledged, “It is difficult to do. It takes time to go back and forth between schools and keep track of all the students and staff” (2000, p. 4, l. 37–38). In Patsy’s words, dealing with this school structure was “tough” and “frustrating” (2000, p. 9, l. 31–35).

Teaching the Whole Child. Patsy’s strong individual disposition toward making a difference in the “whole child”—not just a child’s motor development, but also social, emotional, and intellectual development—combined with her desire to teach in a low SES schools, where children often need constant care and nurturing, resulted in a barrier too high for Patsy to negotiate. “I needed to help them and I couldn’t because the numbers were so overwhelming; there were just so many children” (2001, p. 2, l. 10–11). This sensitivity to students’ needs proved frustrating for Patsy in her role as a physical educator. Her spouse, Everett confirmed, “She wanted to become more deeply involved in their [students] academic lives. She gets involved in their personal lives, too” (2000, p. 2, l. 55– p. 3, l. 4).

Accountability Equals Worthiness. Today’s dialogue of high-stakes testing draws multiple reactions from educators. In Patsy’s case, she was frustrated with the lack of formal accountability for learning in physical education. Patsy recognized the quandary of attempting to hold a PE teacher accountable when, as per school regulations, a child only comes to physical education 36 times a year. She explained, “Given the limited amount of time that they [teacher] see the children, it’s pretty difficult to say that it’s the teacher’s fault that a child can’t do a skill in PE” (2001, p. 10, l. 14–17). This dilemma contributed to Patsy’s dissatisfaction with her role as a physical educator. As a person with an individual disposition toward excelling and being recognized for excellence, she floundered in an environment indifferent to her efforts. As Dr. Pearl, the principal who hired Patsy as a third grade teacher, noted, “She has a great deal of energy and she’s driven to excel,
and that may be another reason why she wanted to be in the regular classroom. She is somewhat competitive, and says that about herself” (2000, p. 3, l. 30–33).

Need for Novelty. A major theme that emerged indicative of Patsy’s career frustration was her personal need for novelty in lessons. This feature of her individual disposition was addressed throughout the interviews. Patsy frequently spoke about issues related to the curriculum and learning environment and reported boredom with teaching physical education, due to the repetitiveness of teaching the same lesson multiple times. This boredom began as early as her second year in the field. Five years after she had left the physical education environment, one could still sense the frustration in Patsy’s voice as she reflected on her experiences; “I tried to find ways to make it [repetitive lessons] better or more exciting (1996, p. 3, l. 7-8). Patsy’s strategy to help combat her sense of boredom was to teach different units concurrently. Patsy described, “I often had three units going on at the same time. What I would do is have fourth and fifth grade doing one unit, and second and third would do a unit, and something totally different for first grade” (2000, p. 8, l. 48–51). According to Patsy, it was worth the extra energy required to teach three different content areas simultaneously to reduce the monotony of teaching in physical education.

Patsy noted that teaching the same lesson multiple times had its advantages. It afforded her the opportunity to fine-tune the lesson each time it was taught, unlike classroom teaching where “There is not like a next class to make it up, so it is pretty much a done deal . . . there is more pressure to get it right the first time” (2001, p. 3, l. 31–33). Patsy disclosed that as a physical educator she was motivated by the challenge of teaching the lesson effectively with the initial attempt, however, it was not enough to deter the boredom which occurred from teaching the same lesson all week long.

Desire for Respect and Recognition. Patsy’s individual disposition for collegial respect and recognition reverberated in every conversation over the years. Positive relationships with professional teaching colleagues and administrators as well as her students and their parents/guardians were necessary for Patsy’s growth and satisfaction as a teacher. Throughout her career as a PE teacher, Patsy reported feeling isolated and marginalized; “You know that you are going to be isolated [in physical education], that is just the way it goes. I loved my colleagues. I just did not have anyone to really talk to about ideas” (2000, p. 11, l. 24–25). Patsy felt fortunate to be able to discuss aspects of her teaching with her husband, who was also a physical educator and who could understand that professional isolation was a factor in her dissatisfaction with physical education teaching. He reported:

We are isolated whether we like it or not. We are on our own. Not many people stop by to check on you. I think she wanted to feel more involved and feel like she was a more integral part of the school. In that respect, I think that the isolation pushed her to go into a more visible setting in the school (2000, p.8, l. 39-44).

Everett also described Patsy as someone who measures her self-worth in how she was viewed as an educator. This need to be acknowledged as a viable contributor to the school’s dynamics, made the isolation characteristic of a physical educator’s role intolerable.
In addition, Patsy repeatedly reported feeling marginalized; the commonly held societal expectation of physical education teaching maintaining a lower status compared with classroom teaching was evident in Patsy’s organizational environment. She explained: “I think, too, that people have to overcome the ‘dumb jock’ issue as well because . . . there were certainly teachers who thought they were smarter than I was because they were elementary classroom teachers” (2001, p. 23, l. 25–27). She smiled and chuckled as she mimicked her classroom colleagues saying, “‘Oh, but you’re such a good writer,’ ‘Oh, you know so much about this,’ whereas, when I was a PE teacher it was very different” (2001, p.23, l. 32–34). Patsy clearly explained that the marginalization she felt as a PE teacher was a major factor in her desire to become a classroom teacher, elaborating:

People didn’t understand PE. My favorite comment is, “Of course they’re [the students] good for you. You teach something fun.” I’m thinking, “It’s a lot harder to do this with these same kids, getting them moving with bats in their hands than it is for you to sit in the classroom and make them do two times two,” you know. But, I never said that.

Conversations with Dr. Pearl in 2000 acknowledged that in some educators’ views, the PE teacher is thought of as the person who relieves the person who is doing the “real” work. Patsy appeared to be a teacher who was deeply affected by this attitude. She indicated that many of her colleagues felt that they, not she, were doing the “real” work. She laughed as she said, “My physical education preparation was very challenging; I always said to myself, ‘If I don’t pass kinesiology, I could be a classroom teacher’” (2000, p.7, l. 36–37).

Career Wind Down and Preservice Stages

As Patsy’s desire to move to the classroom grew stronger, she began to apply for classroom teaching positions. Ultimately, she accepted a job as a third grade teacher in her school district of choice, where she remains today. Patsy reentered the pre-service stage as a classroom teacher concurrent with the physical educator career wind down stage. Dr. Pearl remarked that Patsy, “Needed a change from teaching PE to teaching other areas” (2000, p. 1, 22–23; p. 2, l. 39–41), she completed the required nine university credit hours to become a certified elementary teacher. She explained, “I knew that I wanted to go into the classroom, so I took a lot of classes to help me prepare” (1996, p. 1, l. 31). This positive critical incident in Patsy’s career made for a successful transition from physical educator to third grade teacher.

Induction Stage

Patsy experienced almost immediate success as evidenced by the results of her students’ positive standardized test scores, and described herself as very happy by the end of her first year in the classroom. Patsy’s individual disposition for competition resulted in a feeling of satisfaction when her students clearly excelled. This positive critical incident of the students’ successful performance on the state-mandated standardized tests seemed to afford Patsy the satisfaction and accountability she lacked as a physical educator, and she met the societal expectation that accountability provides worthiness in the school setting.
Teaching PE Provides a Strong Foundation. Though Patsy was academically prepared, she entered the classroom with some trepidation. However, drawing on her cumulative life experiences associated with becoming a physical educator, Patsy quickly gained confidence in the classroom. Using her physical education teaching experience as a strong foundation for transition to the classroom, she reported, “I think that I am a better classroom teacher because of my [physical education] training at the university. Elementary teachers would be better teachers if they went through the PE program” (1996, p. 10, l. 40–41). In those early years in the classroom Patsy was observed using managerial strategies in the classroom that had proven effective for her in the physical education setting. For example, she integrating movement into classroom activities when she instructed, “The people with the right answers, please stand up and dance.” She also used movement to teach verbs—like skip, jump, and hop—balance for symmetry, and even dance to learn multiplication, and indicated that her students are “very strong at multiplication because we do learn them by dancing and making movements to it” (2001, p. 28, l. 13–14).

Patsy credits her physical education background for helping her to adapt to daily changes in lesson plans, “Extending or refining a lesson is natural because we did it so often in PE . . . It’s easy for me because . . . I know in PE I had to do it in every single lesson” (2001, p. 26, l. 30–31, 33–35). In addition, Patsy attributed her immediate success with classroom management to her preparation as a physical education teacher, where each year she taught multiple lessons that focused on establishing a positive learning environment. Observations of Patsy in both physical education and third grade verified her classrooms as settings where positive student behavior was the standard because she established clear rules and procedures . . . something she wanted her colleagues to understand.

Competency Building Stage

During her first few years as a third grade teacher, Patsy’s reputation as an effective teacher spread. Other teachers began to request her as their child’s teacher which contributed to heightened self-esteem within the organizational environment through public trust development and by meeting societal expectations of parents and colleagues. “Every teacher’s child, except for one, is in my classroom. It makes me feel good that parents request me. . . .” (2000, p. 23, l. 34–37). Given her individual disposition toward excelling in her work, it is not surprising that Patsy became so well-respected among her peers.

During this competency building stage, several aspects of the personal and organizational environments that had served as hurdles during her tenure as a physical educator were easily cleared as a classroom teacher. For example, referring to the school regulations related to class scheduling, Patsy explained her satisfaction with the diverse curriculum in her current field. In addition, Patsy’s strong individual disposition toward making a difference in the “whole child” was gratified as she found a greater sense of accomplishment through new extended contact with students.

Within the organizational environment, garnering administrative support allows Patsy to become personally involved with her students. She has been fortunate to have principals who exhibit management styles that recognize the importance of Patsy’s individual disposition toward personal involvement. Mrs. McCullough,
Patsy’s current principal, respects and supports Patsy’s efforts to ground her relationship with students in awareness of their home culture and neighborhood context. She shared, “I have seen evidence of the fact that she does indeed know that teacher knowledge of the family and significant others who are connected are important to her teaching” (2006, p.9, l. 3-5).

**Enthusiastic and Growing Stage**

Patsy sailed right into the *enthusiastic and growing stage*. In 2002, Patsy expended extensive time and effort toward attaining certification as a National Board Certified Middle Child Generalist. Toward this *positive critical incident*, Patsy testified that earning the certification was affirming and esteem-building.

As a classroom teacher, Patsy enjoys the interaction and collaboration she shares with her colleagues, finding acceptance, shared values, and enhanced self-confidence in both *personal* and *organizational environments*. She believes that she meets her colleagues’ *societal expectations*, and she acknowledges flourishing in an environment where she and other teachers constantly banter curricular ideas and student issues and concerns. “We work really well as a grade level and everyone lays her ideas out on the table,” (2006, p.12, l. 12-13) she explained. The lack of collegiality Patsy felt as a physical educator has been replaced by a sense of belonging as a third grade teacher. Patsy explained how many of the school structural issues that made her feel marginalized as a physical educator were resolved as a classroom teacher.

**Career Frustration Stage**

Patsy’s efforts to excel in teaching were not without personal sacrifice. Factors within the *personal environment*—both her lack of *avocational* interests and her efforts to balance *family life* with professional commitments—contributed to her movement once again into the *career frustration stage*. Patsy’s spouse, Everett, concerned about her singular focus as a classroom teacher and lack of *avocational outlets* stated, “It’s hard for her to leave her work. She has no outside hobbies, no outside interests. Everything she does in her spare time involves reading journals or preparing lessons or presentations relating to school” (2000, p. 8, l. 23–26). Maintaining professional and personal life balance is challenging and occasionally results in a period of personal crisis until balance is regained:

After the long awaited birth of my daughter, I was in the *career frustration stage* . . . My husband was annoyed by my dedication and felt that I needed to spend more time with my family. In retrospect, he was correct. I had a very difficult time finding the balance between being a mama and a “demanding” professional. Some may say that I have yet to find that delicate balance, but I know that I have made great strides in this area. (2006, p.10, l. 5–10).

**Career Stability Stage**

Patsy settled into her role as a third grade classroom teacher and in 2006 entered the *career stability stage*. Her husband, Everett, expects Patsy to remain an elementary teacher until retirement. “At the *induction stage* [as a physical educator], I was
an effective teacher but I was arrogant. Today I am less competitive and more supportive towards colleagues. I believe that this change only takes place with experience” (2006, p. 8, l. 4–6).

Enthusiastic and Growing Stage

Unpredictably, Patsy begins her twenty-third year of teaching with a move back to the enthusiastic and growing career stage. During 2008, two positive critical incidents occurred. First, she met her goal of attaining a master’s degree, and second, she was named her school’s “Teacher of the Year.” These two incidents, along with Patsy’s decision to begin the 2008–2009 year at a new school, make her more enthusiastic about her work. The professional challenge of a new teaching environment, along with the two positive critical incidents, stimulates her professionally. Also affected by the move is the family area within her personal environment as Patsy is delighted to be teaching at the school her daughter attends. Although she predicts that she may eventually shift back into the career stability stage, it is exceptional that a veteran teacher of over two decades is so motivated for the upcoming year. No doubt Patsy has plotted a unique career path for herself, and continues to be impacted by the landscape within her teaching environments.

Personal and Organizational Environmental Factors

The teacher career cycle model provides a fitting framework to outline Patsy’s career path, and through examination of the influential personal and organizational factors the following themes emerged: (1) the importance of teaching the “whole child,” (2) accountability equals worthiness, (3) need for novelty in lessons, (4) desire for colleagues’ respect and recognition, and (5) teaching PE as a strong foundation for classroom teaching. Ironically, many of the same factors which adversely impacted Patsy as a physical educator positively influenced her teaching longevity after she moved into the classroom; classes were smaller, allowing more one-on-one interaction with her students, test scores measurably validated her teaching ability, she taught an interesting curriculum in a controlled environment, and she garnered peer respect.

Patsy’s PE career disillusionment can be juxtaposed with her satisfaction in classroom teaching. She began to understand the extent of her teaching accountability needs when she started administering standardized tests. Repetitive PE lesson plans led to increased boredom and a desire for versatility. Further, as a PE teacher Patsy felt inadequate among her teaching colleagues, while now she feels a collegial bond with her classroom peers. Even though personal and organizational factors surrounding physical education forced Patsy out of the field, she still relies on the lessons learned during her tenure as a physical educator. Reciting several examples, she particularly credits her excellent class management skills to her training in PE.

Conclusion

This narrative research offers an opportunity to bridge the quantitative “supply and demand” demographic research gap to offer answers to the questions of when, why, and how teachers change (Casey, 1995–1996; Murnane et al., 1988; Singer
Researchers agree that longitudinal study of teachers throughout their career stages along with their professional histories offer valuable insight into the factors that motivate teachers as well as the reasons they change or burnout and leave the profession all together (Moreira et al., 2002; Murnane et al., 1988; Singer & Willett, 1996; Sparkes & Templin, 1990; Willett & Singer, 1989). However, very few studies of this type exist, particularly in the context of physical education, and lack of available research can lead to further feelings of marginalization by professionals outside of core academic fields (Moreira et al., 2002; Sparkes & Templin, 1990; Stroot, Faucette, & Schwager, 1993). This case study furthers this limited research by exploring one teacher’s transformation from physical education to general education through the use of narrative research framed by Fessler and Christensen’s (1992) teacher career cycle model. The conclusions presented in this section are gleamed from one individual, and generalizations should be applied with caution.

During this examination of her career, Patsy reported being either positively or negatively affected by each personal and organizational environment component with the exception of unions—there are no unions in her state—and professional organizations. Patsy immediately faced family issues during her induction into teaching PE when she married Everett and moved back to her hometown early in her career, and later at the birth of her child. Several positive critical incidents occurred (e.g., graduate and certification studies, mentoring, becoming a National Board Certified Middle Child Generalist, being named “Teacher of the Year”) during the competency building, preservice, and enthusiastic and growing stages. She experienced career frustration within the individual disposition (lack of personal relationships with students), societal expectations (lack of respect for the field), and regulations (PE class size) components . . . Yet she found satisfaction in each of these areas within the classroom; fewer students lead to building richer relationships with each student, she felt respected by both her colleagues as well as the larger community, and the accountability regulations she encountered were motivating and seen by Patsy as a way to “prove” her abilities as an educator. Enthusiastic and growing, Patsy was excited about her work and her life as a classroom teacher. Patsy experienced some degree of crisis when trying to balance career and family after the birth of her daughter. Administration management style adversely affected her as she attempted to move from PE to the classroom during the career wind-down stage adding to her frustration, but once moved she experienced positive administrative support. She drew on her cumulative life experiences as a PE teacher to manage her classroom, thrived on regulations requiring accountability, and has garnered respect from her colleagues and parents meeting societal expectations and gaining public trust as a popular, driven teacher. The combined effect has led to her feelings of reaching career stability, and surprisingly a cycle back to the enthusiastic and growing stage. This attitude is similar to the midcareer teachers studied by Hargreaves (2005) who found the teachers at this stage were typically more relaxed, knowledgeable and comfortable about their teaching and themselves, but still enthusiastic and flexible enough to respond to change in a broadly positive way.

Elementary PE teachers, in particular, have to contend with challenging personal and organizational environments—limited contact with students, inadequate facilities and equipment, large classes and class management issues, lack of respect,
fear of budget cuts, and physical and emotional isolation. Keeping PE teachers in the profession requires paying attention to their teaching self-efficacy needs. They are rarely acknowledged or recognized as having particular needs for development or for the impact they make on their pupils. Teacher self-efficacy is dependent upon socialization—meeting societal expectations and public trust issues of colleagues and administrators who evaluate their ability to teach and manage their classes and of parents whose children they teach (Fessler & Christensen, 1992; Stroot et al., 1993).

Even though attrition rates are higher among recent hires, teachers require or expect as much support throughout the different career stages as they do as beginning teachers, and have a desire for good relationships with administrators, colleagues, and pupils while maintaining balance in their personal lives (Fraser, Draper, & Taylor, 1998; Huberman, 1989). Depersonalization and emotional exhaustion become critical teacher burnout factors (Burke et al., 1996, Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). Viewing Patsy’s physical education career through the lens of the teacher career cycle model provides insight into areas of change required in the field if we are to motivate and retain quality PE teachers. Special attention should be paid to the circumstances leading to the career frustration stage from both the personal and organizational environmental perspectives. Studying Patsy’s socialization into the teaching profession for the past 22 years suggests various factors that PE teacher educators, school policy makers, and reformers may consider in preparing, supporting, and retaining PE teachers.

For example, the data indicates that, at a personal level, Patsy did not find her work as a PE teacher meaningful. One primary reason dealt with her sense that she was not making a difference in the personal growth of her students—socially, emotionally, or academically. Patsy’s individual disposition holds to a strong ideology that teacher knowledge of family and significant others connected to the child is critical to student learning. She felt she had to understand what was going on in a child’s life outside of school. Considering this point, from a school regulations perspective in the organizational environment, this task was difficult to accomplish when teaching approximately 800 physical education students each week. In reflection, Patsy indicates that although she values physical education as an important subject area, she continues to believe that she is better able to meet the individual needs (social, emotional, and academic) of her students as a classroom teacher because of the number of contact hours with each individual and his or her family. Lowering teacher-student ratios and providing daily physical education programs where a physical education teacher has more opportunities to interact with his/her students may be required if we are to meet Patsy’s need to develop deeper relationships with his/her students.

The lack of accountability that exists in physical education presented another self efficacy hurdle. As a physical educator, Patsy floundered in an environment seemingly indifferent to her efforts, unlike her current situation where regulated high-stakes testing is the name of the game. Engaging effective teachers like Patsy means engaging them as leaders. Many teachers never feel at home in the profession. During her time as a PE teacher, Patsy felt like an unappreciated outsider. Her need to be acknowledged as a viable contributor to the school’s dynamics made the isolation characteristic of a physical educator’s role intolerable. She repeatedly reported feeling that her colleagues did not respect her as a teacher because of the subject matter she taught. Had Patsy been provided more opportunities to serve
in leadership roles, she might have found physical education more intellectually challenging and rewarding.

Further, this study indicates that some teachers’ career development in physical education may be adversely affected in an organizational environment where they are the only PE teacher. This regulated, work-alone environment fails to provide the motivation and challenging socialization stimulation needed, particularly in light of physical education’s marginalized position. As Eldar et al. (2003) assert, it is crucial for schools to provide comfortable and supportive environments for beginning teachers where their professional, social, and emotional needs are met. Creating collaborative support structures and opportunities for PE teachers is vital if they are to find the intellectual stimulation that will hold them in the profession. Guarino, Santibanez, and Daley (2006), for example, in a meta-analysis found that the school-based mentoring and induction programs, particularly those related to collegial support, often play an important role in teachers’ choice to leave or remain in the profession. For most teachers, finding placements with colleagues who are willing to share ideas, listen, and learn from each other is critical to happiness and satisfaction as a teacher in both personal and organizational environments. For Patsy, collaboration—with colleagues, administrators, parents, and students—is crucial to her happiness. The systematic absence of such opportunities during her days as an elementary PE teacher proved to be a significant ingredient leading to dissatisfaction and frustration.

Given that Patsy began her career identified by the teacher education faculty as one of the best and brightest in her class of preservice teacher candidates (Woods & Lynn, 2001), it seems logical that teacher education programs should consider the barriers Patsy encountered and find ways to forecast these for candidates in meaningful ways. Case studies that involve the barriers Patsy negotiated might allow for rich discussion with teacher candidates about how and why they might handle similar situations. Teacher educators should give more than a cursory focus to preservice teacher candidate’s values about teaching and learning. Patsy’s belief that education should be child-centered made it difficult for her to negotiate teaching hundreds of students each week. Throughout their program candidates should be engaged in discussions regarding their core values, not only what their core beliefs are but deeper discussions about how those beliefs may or may not be supported in the institutions in which they work. The realities of Patsy’s actual conditions of work also seemed to have had a significant impact on her career path. Inviting early career teachers to share their experiences with the candidates’, particularly those who “look like” Patsy and could speak to ways in which they have successfully negotiated the barriers Patsy faced seems a plausible strategy for forecasting these career obstacles.

Teachers, like Patsy, enter the profession with wide-eyed determination and enthusiasm—much like Dorothy as she set out down the yellow brick road—searching for the right career path. And, like Patsy, most teachers experience unbelievable personal and organizational environmental challenges in their quest to excel in their chosen field. Through Patsy’s voice—both during her teaching experiences and as reflections on past experiences—we gain a greater understanding of why some teachers are unable to negotiate environmental hurdles that are commonplace in physical education. Teachers’ values and experiences have a power influence on how they will make use of their situations. In discussions with individual teachers
about the factors within their careers that are significant to them, we learn which
environmental factors promote professional satisfaction and growth, and which
lead to professional stagnation and frustration. Ultimately, to retain quality physi-
cal educators we must understand the personal and organizational environmental
factors that promote or deter job satisfaction, and designing positive professional
development experiences based on those environmental needs at specific career
stages within the teacher career cycle.

References


