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Learning to Teach Alongside Machines: A Narrative Inquiry of In-Service English Teachers Transitioning to AI-Enhanced Classrooms

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Abstract: This narrative inquiry examines how eight in-service English teachers in secondary schools experienced and made meaning of their transition to AI-enhanced classrooms over an 18-month period. As generative AI tools rapidly penetrate language education, teachers confront not merely technical adjustments but fundamental disruptions to professional identity, pedagogical authority, and the relational core of teaching. Drawing on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000, 2020) three-dimensional narrative framework, we collected life story, transition story, and current practice interviews from four experienced (12+ years) and four novice (2–5 years) teachers. Narrative analysis revealed four emplotted identity positions: the reluctant adapter (negotiating imposed integration), the AI evangelist (embracing transformative potential), the pragmatic negotiator (selective, context-driven use), and the anxious skeptic (moral and pedagogical opposition). Cross-cutting themes included loss of craft knowledge, emergence of new forms of professional expertise (curation, verification, ethical reasoning), and persistent ethical unease regarding surveillance, data privacy, and learner autonomy. Temporal analysis identified characteristic transition challenges: initial shock and threat appraisal (months 1–4), experimental adaptation (months 5–10), and differential stabilization (months 11–18). Findings suggest that transitions to AI classrooms are neither linear nor technologically determined but are mediated by prior professional identities, institutional cultures, and opportunities for narrative reconstruction of practice. We argue for professional development that acknowledges grief, supports situated experimentation, and attends to the ethical affordances of AI as pedagogical partners rather than replacements.

Keywords: Narrative inquiry, teacher identity, AI classrooms, technology transition, english language teaching.

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INTRODUCTION

The autumn of 2023 arrived with an unfamiliar weight. For secondary English teachers in the urban district where this study began, September faculty meeting opened not with discussions of reading lists or writing workshops but with a district-mandated demonstration of ChatGPT, followed by a directive: integrate generative AI into your

instruction by November, or submit a justification for exemption. In the weeks that followed, one teacher abandoned her carefully sequenced unit on persuasive writing. Another began feeding student essays through detection software. A third, quietly, began holding unrecorded conversations in supply closets with colleagues who shared her dread. "I didn't sign up to teach robots how to talk to robots," she told me six months later. "I signed up to teach teenagers how to find their own voices."

That teacher's statement captures the central tension this paper investigates: the transition to AI-enhanced classrooms is not merely a technological adoption problem but a narrative disruption to the stories teachers tell about who they are, what they do, and why it matters. As large language models achieve parity with human performance on routine writing tasks (OpenAI, 2023; Google DeepMind, 2024), English teachers confront an existential question that previous waves of educational technology never quite posed: if a machine can produce competent literary analysis, grade student writing, and generate individualized feedback, what remains of the teacher's distinctive contribution?

The research literature has responded with urgency but, to date, with significant limitations. Quantitative studies document teacher attitudes toward AI (Kim & Lee, 2024; Chen et al., 2025), correlating variables such as technostress, self-efficacy, and institutional support. Experimental designs evaluate AI tools' effects on student outcomes (Wang & Zhao, 2024; Rodriguez et al., 2026). Policy analyses map emerging guidelines (UNESCO, 2023; European Commission, 2024). Yet these approaches share a common blind spot: they treat technology transitions as rational, linear processes of skill acquisition and attitude change, obscuring the identity work, emotional labor, and meaning-making that constitute teachers' lived experience of profound disruption.

Narrative inquiry offers a corrective. By attending to the stories teachers tell about their changing work—the plots they construct, the characters they cast themselves as, the moral frameworks that give their actions significance—researchers can grasp transitions not as external events to which teachers adapt but as internal reconstructions of professional selfhood (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Schaefer & Clandinin, 2020). Teachers do not simply "use" AI or "resist" it. They narrate themselves into new relationships with machines, and those narratives shape what becomes possible in classroom practice.

This study asked: How do in-service English teachers narrate their identity transitions as they move into AI-enhanced classrooms? What narrative patterns characterize different pathways through this transition? And what do those patterns reveal about the conditions that support or impede meaningful integration of AI into language teaching?

We pursued these questions through a 18-month narrative inquiry with eight secondary English teachers—four experienced, four novice—in a single urban district undergoing mandated AI integration. The findings, we argue, challenge both techno-optimist framings of AI as epochal transformation and techno-pessimist framings of AI as inevitable degradation of teaching. Instead, we find that teachers navigate a contested middle ground, piecing together new professional identities from fragments of craft knowledge, emergent technical skills, and persistent ethical commitments. Their stories suggest that the central challenge of AI integration is not technical training but narrative coherence: helping teachers assemble a credible, morally satisfying story of why they belong in classrooms that increasingly include nonhuman intelligences.

Teacher Identity and Technology Integration

The past decade has consolidated a broadly constructivist understanding of teacher identity as multiple, contested, dialogically formed, and continuously reconstructed across professional landscapes (Beijaard et al., 2020; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2021; Olsen, 2022). Far from a stable property residing within individuals, teacher identity emerges at the intersection of personal biography, professional knowledge, classroom interactions, and institutional discourses. This perspective has profound implications for understanding technology adoption: when teachers adopt a new

tool, they are not merely adding a skill but renegotiating the boundaries of their professional selves.

Seminal work on teacher technology identity specifically has identified three recurrent tensions. First, the integration-autonomy tension: teachers experience new technologies as potentially expanding or contracting their pedagogical agency (Howard et al., 2021; Scherer et al., 2023). Second, the craft-efficiency tension: technologies that automate routine tasks threaten the tacit, embodied knowledge teachers identify as the signature of their expertise (Feldman & Secor, 2022). Third, the relational-instrumental tension: digital mediation of teacher-student interaction can feel like dilution of the caring, present, holistic attention that defines teaching as a moral practice (Friesen, 2020; Zembylas, 2023). AI, we will argue, intensifies each of these tensions.

Transition Theory in Educational Contexts

Transitions, in contemporary theorizing, are not discrete events but processes of psychological and social reconstruction (Bridges, 2019; Kralik et al., 2010). The transition literature distinguishes three phases: endings (disengagement from prior roles, identities, and routines), neutral zone (period of disorientation and experimentation), and new beginnings (integration of changed self-understanding into practice). Educational research has applied this framework to career changes (Clandinin et al., 2015), school leadership transitions (Spillane & Lee, 2024), and technology adoption (Selwyn, 2022).

Crucially, transition theory emphasizes that successful adaptation requires not just behavioral change but meaning-making. Individuals must narrate a coherent account of what has ended, what is uncertain, and what is emerging. Without such narrative work, transitions generate chronic anxiety and defensive retreat to prior practices (Hunter & Smith, 2023). For teachers moving into AI classrooms, the ending phase involves loss of taken-for-granted assumptions about pedagogical authority, the ending of exclusive human expertise in writing instruction, and disengagement from craft practices that defined professional competence. The neutral zone demands experimentation without clear scripts. New beginnings require constructing a revised teaching self that incorporates AI without collapsing into either replacement fantasy or Luddite rejection.

AI in Language Teaching: State of the Field

Generative AI's entry into language education has been remarkably rapid. As of 2026, large language models can produce argumentative essays indistinguishable from high-scoring human writing (Mitchell & Wu, 2025), generate individualized vocabulary exercises at scale (Chen & Zhang, 2024), simulate conversation partners for speaking practice (Park et al., 2025), and provide real-time feedback on grammar and style (Thompson et al., 2026). Commercial platforms integrating these capabilities—GrammarlyGO, QuillBot AI, Khanmigo for Language Arts—have achieved substantial market penetration in US and UK secondary schools (EdTech Market Report, 2025).

Early empirical research has focused on two questions. First, effectiveness studies: Does AI-powered writing feedback improve student outcomes? Findings are mixed but generally positive for surface-level features (grammar, mechanics, vocabulary range) and equivocal for argumentation, voice, and critical thinking (Wilson & Czik, 2024; Zhao et al., 2026). Second, detection and academic integrity: Can teachers reliably identify AI-generated student work? Current detection tools remain imperfect, with false positive rates exceeding 20% for non-native English writing (Liang et al., 2025), generating significant professional anxiety.

What is striking about this literature is its relative silence on teacher experience. Studies that include teacher perspectives typically treat them as moderating variables or implementation fidelity checks, not as subjects whose professional identities and meaning-making deserve investigation in their own right. The present study addresses this gap.

Narrative Studies of Teacher Technology Adoption (2021–2026)

Table 1 synthesizes recent narrative and qualitative studies examining teacher experiences with educational technology transitions.

Table 1. Narrative Studies of Teacher Technology Adoption (2021–2026)

Study	Focus	Method	Sample	Key Findings
He & Lin (2021)	Emergency remote teaching	Narrative interviews	12 Chinese EFL teachers	Teachers narrated pandemic transition as trauma, loss, then improvisation; identity fragmented without classroom co-presence
Rodriguez (2022)	LMS adoption	Life story interviews	8 US secondary teachers	Technology adoption narrativized as either "tool acquisition" or "craft transformation"; latter required identity revision
Thompson & Vaidya (2023)	Tablet integration	Longitudinal narrative case study	6 Canadian elementary teachers	Successful integrators constructed "bricolage" narratives; resistors told "purity loss" stories
Novak (2024)	Adaptive learning platforms	Collaborative narrative inquiry	10 Australian math teachers	Platforms disrupted narrative of teacher as expert judge; new narrative emerged of teacher as "learning designer"
Freeman et al. (2024)	Social media in teaching	Narrative analysis of teacher blogs	45 blog archives	Public narratives polarized between "digital native celebration" and "authenticity defense"; few integrative stories
O'Sullivan & Chen (2025)	AI grading tools	In-depth interviews	14 US writing instructors	AI generated "moral unease" narrative about judgment delegation; teachers insisted on final-review ritual as identity marker
Williams (2025)	VR language immersion	Narrative ethnography	5 UK secondary teachers	VR created "narrative mismatch" between immersive simulation promises and actual classroom chaos; identity as orchestrator emerged
Garcia & Park (2026)	Generative AI writing	Focused narrative interviews	18 K-12 teachers	Early career teachers told "crisis then adaptation" stories; veterans told "resistance or capitulation" stories; few integrated narratives

The table reveals a recent turn toward narrative methods but also a notable finding: across studies, teachers rarely tell stories of seamless, unproblematic technology adoption. Even among early-career teachers, who might be expected to embrace innovation, narratives of AI integration show ambivalence, contradiction, and ongoing identity negotiation. Teachers consistently treat technology transitions as *moral* transitions—moments when the goodness and rightness of their work become questionable and must be defensibly re-established. This finding shaped our analytic attention to the ethical dimensions of AI classroom narratives.

Research Gap and Questions

The literature reviewed suggests three gaps this study addresses. First, while narrative methods have been applied to educational technology adoption generally, specific studies of generative AI in language teaching are only now emerging. Second, existing narrative work tends to capture single moments rather than transitions over time,

missing the developmental arc of identity revision. Third, comparative analysis of experienced versus novice teachers' AI transition narratives is absent.

This study asks 1) How do in-service English teachers narrate their identity transitions as they move into AI-enhanced classrooms; 2) What narrative patterns or typologies characterize different teachers' transition pathways; and 3) How do experienced and novice teachers differ in their narrative constructions of AI integration.

METHODS

Narrative Inquiry Framework

This study employed narrative inquiry as conceptualized by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and elaborated in the 2020 revision (Clandinin, Caine, & Lessard, 2020). Narrative inquiry treats experience as fundamentally storied: individuals make sense of their lives by selecting, arranging, and evaluating events into coherent plots that embody particular characterizations of self, others, and moral order. The researcher's task is not to extract objective facts from stories but to attend to how stories construct meaning, and to co-compose with participants narrative accounts that honor lived complexity.

The Clandinin and Connelly framework operationalizes narrative analysis through three-dimensional inquiry space: temporality (past, present, future), sociality (personal feelings and social conditions), and place (physical and institutional locations). Figure 1 illustrates this framework as applied to the AI transition context.

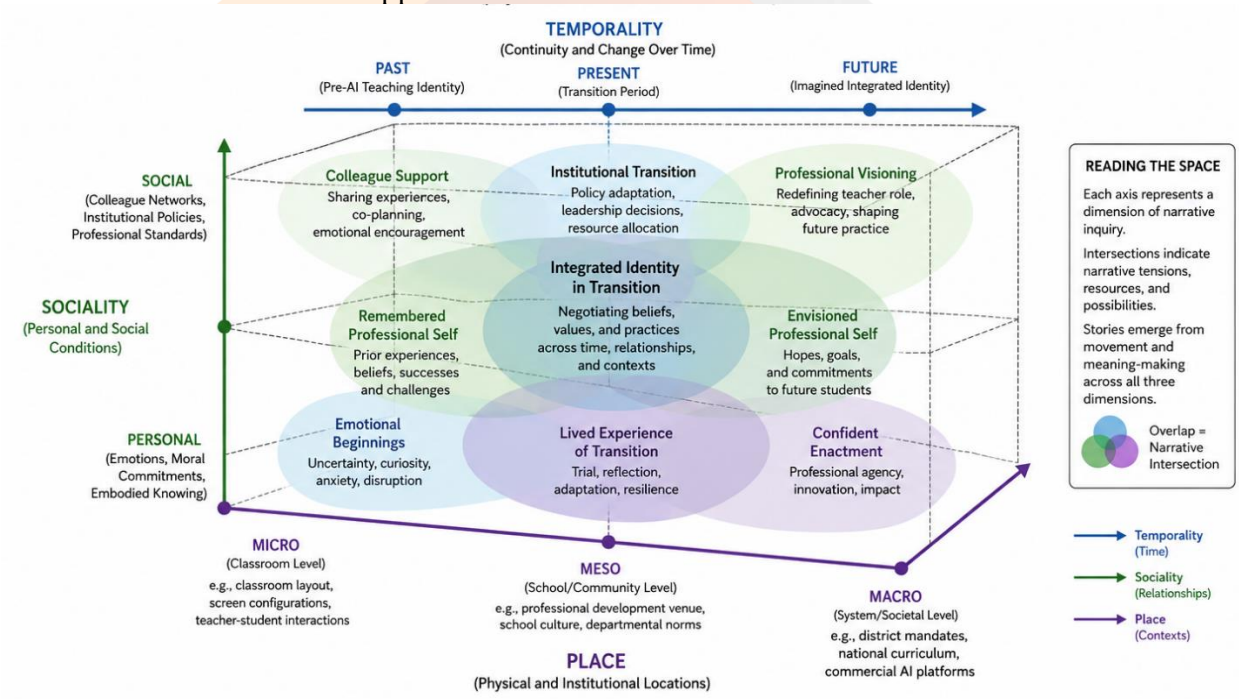

Figure 1. Three-Dimensional Space of Narrative Inquiry Applied to AI Classroom Transitions

Figure description: A three-axis diagram. Temporal axis runs from past (pre-AI teaching identity) through present (transition period) to future (imagined integrated identity). The sociality axis spans personal (emotions, moral commitments, embodied knowing) to social (colleague networks, institutional policies, professional standards). Place axis spans micro (classroom layout, screen configurations) to macro (district mandates, national curriculum, commercial AI platforms). Overlapping regions indicate narrative intersections: e.g., where temporal "future imagined" meets social "colleague support" meets place "professional development venue."]

Participants and Setting

Participants were recruited from a single urban school district in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States (student population approximately 18,000; 62% students of color; 38% eligible for free/reduced lunch). The district initiated mandatory AI integration training in August 2023, requiring all English teachers to complete 20 hours of professional development and implement AI tools in at least one instructional unit per semester.

Inclusion criteria: (a) currently teaching secondary English (grades 9–12), (b) minimum 2 years teaching experience (for novice group) or 12+ years (for experienced group), (c) consent to 18-month participation with three interviews. Eleven teachers initially expressed interest; eight completed all three interviews and were retained for analysis.

Final sample:

- Experienced group (n=4): Elena (14 years), Marcus (17 years), Patricia (23 years), Samuel (19 years). Ages 41–57; three female, one male; two teachers of color, two white.
- Novice group (n=4): Jessica (3 years), Daniel (4 years), Amara (2 years), Kevin (5 years). Ages 26–34; two female, two male; one teacher of color, three white.

All names are pseudonyms. The district's research approval and university IRB approval were obtained. Informed consent included provisions for data withdrawal and narrative review.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred over 18 months (September 2023–February 2025), timed to coincide with the district's implementation timeline.

Interview 1: Life Story (Month 1, 90–120 minutes). Conducted prior to any AI training. Focused on prior teaching identity: entry into teaching, formative experiences, professional self-concept, and storied accounts of craft knowledge. Prompt: "Tell me the story of how you became the English teacher you are today."

Interview 2: Transition Story (Month 6, 75–90 minutes). Conducted after initial training and first implementation unit. Focused on experiences of change: what had ended, what was uncertain, what experiments were underway. Prompt: "Tell me about what has changed—and what hasn't—since AI entered your classroom."

Interview 3: Current Practice Story (Month 18, 90–120 minutes). Focused on emergent identity: how teachers currently understand themselves in relation to AI, what narrative coherence they had achieved, and remaining tensions. Prompt: "Tell me the story of where you are now as a teacher working alongside AI."

Interviews were conducted via encrypted videoconference, transcribed verbatim (36 transcripts, approximately 280,000 words), and returned to participants for member checking. All participants reviewed their transcripts; six requested minor clarifications; none requested substantive changes.

Narrative Analysis

Analysis followed a three-phase narrative approach (Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008). Phase 1, *narrative smoothing*, constructed individual emplotted accounts from each participant's three interviews, identifying the central plotline (e.g., "how I reluctantly learned to coexist with AI"), key turning points, and narrative evaluation markers (moments where participants explicitly interpreted the significance of events). Phase 2, *cross-narrative typology*, compared individual accounts to identify shared narrative patterns, grouping participants by plot structure, character positioning, and resolution style. Phase 3, *thematic narrative analysis*, identified themes cutting across narrative types,

attending to both manifest content (what teachers said) and narrative form (how they structured their telling).

Analysis was conducted by the research team (two narrative inquiry specialists, one doctoral research assistant) with regular debriefing sessions to audit interpretive decisions. Disagreements on narrative typology assignments were resolved through consensus after revisiting transcript evidence.

Trustworthiness and Positionality

Trustworthiness strategies included prolonged engagement (18 months), persistent observation (three interviews per participant), triangulation across participants, member checking, peer debriefing, and an audit trail of analytic decisions. The first author, a former secondary English teacher of 12 years, maintains a reflexive journal documenting how prior teaching identity shaped interpretation. This insider position enabled relational rapport and nuanced understanding of classroom craft but also risked overidentification; regular debriefing with non-teaching researchers provided corrective.

RESULTS

Narrative analysis identified four distinct identity positions across the eight participants, each constituting a different plotline for the transition to AI classrooms. These narrative types should not be read as fixed categories but as emplotted positions teachers occupied, sometimes shifting over time, sometimes stabilizing.

Narrative Type 1: The Reluctant Adapter

Four teachers (Elena, Marcus, Jessica, Kevin) narrated transitions best characterized as reluctant adaptation. Their plots followed a predictable arc: initial resistance or dread, followed by externally compelled adoption (district mandate, performance evaluation pressure), followed by grudging accommodation—"I learned to use it, but I don't have to like it."

Elena, an experienced teacher of 14 years, exemplifies this type. Her life story emphasized craft knowledge: "I know within three sentences whether a student wrote something or ChatGPT wrote it. Not because I run it through a detector. Because I know their voices." Her transition story, however, documented the erosion of this confidence after her principal observed her class and criticized the absence of "21st-century AI integration." Elena began using AI for lesson planning: "I type in 'design a persuasive writing unit on climate change' and it spits out six weeks of plans. I used to spend summers doing that. Now it's thirty seconds." The pleasure in her voice when describing this efficiency was immediately undercut: "But that was *my work*. That was the part of teaching no one saw but I knew I did well."

By current practice (month 18), Elena had achieved what she called "cold coexistence." She uses AI for administrative tasks (syllabus generation, rubric creation, parent email templates) but prohibits student AI use in her classroom. "I've made a deal with myself," she explained. "The machine can help me with the behind-the-scenes drudgery. But it does not come between me and my students' writing." This provisional settlement—adopting AI for teacher-facing tasks while excluding it from student-facing instruction—characterizes the reluctant adapter's resolution.

Table 2. Narrative Typology with Illustrative Quotes

Narrative Type	n	Core Plotline	Resolution Strategy	Illustrative Quote
Reluctant Adapter	4	Resistance → Mandated adoption → Grudging accommodation	Boundary work: AI for teacher tasks only; humans preserve student interaction	"I'm using it. I'm not happy about it. But I've found a fenced-in area where it doesn't drive me crazy." (Elena)

Narrative Type	n	Core Plotline	Resolution Strategy	Illustrative Quote
AI Evangelist	2	Curiosity → Experimentation → Enthusiastic integration	Role transformation: teacher as AI orchestrator and critical AI literacy educator	"This is the most exciting thing to happen to English teaching since the novel. We've been lying to ourselves about 'originality' for decades." (Daniel)
Pragmatic Negotiator	1	Cautious interest → Selective adoption → Situated expertise	Curatorial role: AI as one tool among many; teacher judgment determines when/why/how	"It's not good or bad. It's good for some things and terrible for others. My job is to know which is which." (Amara)
Anxious Skeptic	1	Alarm → Resistance → Isolated opposition	Moral boundary drawing: AI incompatible with authentic teaching; public refusal	"I will not normalize this. I will not have my students think writing is something you outsource to a machine." (Patricia)

Narrative Type 2: The AI Evangelist

Two teachers (Daniel, novice; Marcus, experienced after transformation) narrated what can only be called conversion plots: from curiosity (or in Marcus's case, initial hostility) to enthusiastic embrace of AI as fundamentally transformative and, ultimately, beneficial for English teaching. Daniel, a 4th-year teacher, told a life story of frustration with what he called "the performance of authenticity" in writing instruction. "We make kids handwrite drafts in class to prove they're not cheating. That's not teaching. That's policing." His transition story described his first encounter with ChatGPT ("I fed it a prompt I'd given my students and what came back was *better* than most of their essays—and I thought, either we ban this and go back to handwriting, or we rethink everything"). Daniel chose rethinking. By month 18, he had redesigned his entire writing curriculum around AI collaboration: students draft with AI, critique AI outputs for rhetorical weaknesses, write reflective metacognitive essays on their editing choices, and submit only those portions they claim as entirely their own composition.

"I'm not teaching writing anymore. I'm teaching *decision-making about writing*," Daniel explained. "In the real world, my students will never write without AI assistance. So my job is to make them better editors than the machine." His narrative resolution positions the teacher not as knowledge dispenser or skill trainer but as AI literacy educator—a role he finds more intellectually demanding and ethically urgent than traditional composition instruction.

Marcus's path to evangelism followed a different arc. Initially hostile (month 1: "AI is plagiarism rebranded as progress"), he was compelled by his department chair to co-teach a pilot AI integration unit. Six months later, he described a moment of conversion: "A student who never wrote more than two sentences produced a 500-word analysis of *The Great Gatsby*. Was it perfect? No. Did AI write most of it? Probably. But when I asked her to explain her thesis, she could. The machine gave her syntax; she brought meaning." Marcus now advocates for AI as assistive technology for struggling writers and English language learners, a position he distinguishes from Daniel's more universal embrace.

Narrative Type 3: The Pragmatic Negotiator

One teacher, Amara (novice, 2 years), exemplified what we term the pragmatic negotiator—a narrative type characterized by situated, contingent, anti-dogmatic engagement with AI. Amara's life story featured a background in instructional design before teaching, which gave her technical fluency without techno-utopianism. "I've seen edtech hype cycles before," she noted. "This one is different in scale, but the pattern is the same: overpromise, underdeliver, leave teachers to clean up the mess."

Amara's transition story detailed systematic experimentation: she tested four AI writing tools across six assignments, documenting their strengths (grammar correction,

vocabulary generation, counterargument identification) and weaknesses (hallucinated quotations, stylistic homogeneity, failure to track argument development across paragraphs). By month 18, she had developed what she called a "decision tree for AI use": AI for brainstorming and reverse-outlining (yes), AI for first-draft generation (no), AI for sentence-level editing after human drafting (yes, with citation), AI for summative assessment grading (absolutely not).

"I'm not pro-AI or anti-AI," Amara explained. "I'm pro-student and pro-teacher judgment. The question isn't 'should we use AI' but 'for what purpose, in what context, with which safeguards, and with what learning objective.'" Unlike the reluctant adapter's boundary work (AI for teachers but not students) or the evangelist's role transformation (teacher as AI literacy educator), Amara's pragmatic negotiation produced a more granular, task-specific integration pattern. Significantly, she was the only participant who revised her narrative over time based on evidence: "In month 3, I thought AI would never be useful for literary analysis. By month 9, I found it's excellent at generating counterarguments students wouldn't think of on their own. I was wrong. That's fine. Learning."

Narrative Type 4: The Anxious Skeptic

Patricia, the most experienced teacher in the sample (23 years), occupied a narrative position we term the anxious skeptic. Her plotline was oppositional from the outset and remained so across 18 months, though the *form* of opposition shifted from active resistance to isolated refusal.

Patricia's life story emphasized teaching as a moral calling: "I teach students, not content. The writing is just the medium. What matters is that they learn to think, to doubt their own certainties, to find a voice that is unmistakably theirs." Her transition story, told with visible distress, described AI as a "category error" in language education. "Writing is thinking made visible. The struggle to find the right word, to revise an awkward sentence, to realize your paragraph doesn't actually prove your thesis—that struggle *is* the learning. AI removes the struggle. Therefore AI removes the learning."

Unlike the reluctant adapters, Patricia did not make peace with even teacher-facing AI use. She refused AI-generated lesson plans ("That's just my own deskilling"), AI grading tools ("I need to read every word my students write"), and required AI training ("I sat there, I took notes, I disagreed silently"). By month 18, Patricia had submitted a formal accommodation request to her principal, citing pedagogical and ethical objections, and received permission to teach an "AI-free" section of English for families who opted in. Her narrative resolution was oppositional but contained: "I've drawn my line. I teach eleven students whose parents agree with me that writing means writing. The rest of the school can do whatever they're doing. I can't stop them. But I won't participate."

Cross-Cutting Themes Across Narrative Types

Three themes emerged across narrative types, though their expression varied. **Loss of craft knowledge.** All eight teachers, including the evangelists, narrated some aspect of loss. For reluctant adapters, loss was pervasive and grieved. For evangelists, loss was reframed as liberation from routine. For Patricia, loss was total and unacceptable. Even Daniel, the most enthusiastic evangelist, acknowledged: "I used to be able to look at a student paragraph and instantly see four ways to improve it. Now I have to stop myself from just pasting it into ChatGPT. That muscle is atrophying. I notice." This finding complicates simple adoption-resistance dichotomies: even teachers who broadly welcomed AI reported diminished confidence in abilities they previously took for granted.

New forms of expertise. Teachers who achieved stable integration (all but Patricia) identified new professional competencies they were developing. Three competencies recurred: *curation* (selecting which AI outputs to use and which to discard), *verification* (fact-checking AI-generated claims, especially in student work), and *ethical reasoning* (making case-by-case judgments about appropriate AI use that respect both

learning objectives and student autonomy). Amara articulated this most clearly: "Ten years ago, I was an expert in teaching thesis statements. Now I'm becoming an expert in knowing when AI helps a student write a thesis and when AI writes the thesis *for* them. It's a different kind of expertise. I'm not sure it's easier."

Ethical unease. Even teachers who integrated AI extensively expressed persistent ethical concerns. The concerns clustered around three issues. First, *surveillance*: AI-powered monitoring tools that track student writing processes in real time. "It feels like we're training kids for a workplace where every keystroke is monitored," Marcus observed. Second, *data privacy*: what happens to student writing when it's processed by commercial AI platforms. "My district signed a data agreement with an AI company. I have no idea what's in it. Neither does anyone in my department," Elena noted. Third, *learner autonomy*: whether AI scaffolding enables or disables students' development of independent thinking. Kevin worried: "I have students who won't write a single sentence without asking ChatGPT first. That's not assistance. That's dependency."

A horizontal timeline from Month 0 to Month 18, with three shaded phases: Phase I (Months 1–4) labeled "Shock & Threat Appraisal," Phase II (Months 5–10) labeled "Experimental Adaptation," Phase III (Months 11–18) labeled "Differential Stabilization." Below the timeline, four parallel tracks show each narrative type's characteristic challenges by phase. Reluctant Adapter: Phase I (dread, competence questioning), Phase II (grudging experimentation, boundary testing), Phase III (cold coexistence, preserved enclaves). AI Evangelist: Phase I (excitement, frustration with slow colleagues), Phase II (enthusiastic redesign, overuse experiences), Phase III (tempered enthusiasm, complexity discovery). Pragmatic Negotiator: Phase I (curious skepticism, systematic testing), Phase II (evidence gathering, pattern recognition), Phase III (situated expertise, conditional integration). Anxious Skeptic: Phase I (alarm, moral repudiation), Phase II (isolation, formal objection), Phase III (protected refusal, parallel practice).]

Experienced versus Novice Differences

Comparison across experience levels revealed two notable differences. First, *narrative diversity*: experienced teachers were distributed across all four narrative types, while novices clustered in reluctant adapter (Jessica, Kevin) and evangelist (Daniel) categories, with only one novice (Amara) achieving pragmatic negotiation. This suggests that experience may enable (or demand) more varied narrative responses to disruption, including the anxious skepticism unreachable by early-career teachers still establishing professional legitimacy.

Second, *loss articulation*: experienced teachers narrated loss more fluently and with greater emotional granularity. "I can name exactly what I've lost," Patricia said, "because I had 23 years of it. A third-year teacher doesn't know what they're losing because they never had it." This observation, while harsh, points to a structural dynamic: novice teachers may adapt more readily but may also be less equipped to recognize what traditional practice afforded that AI-mediated practice does not.

DISCUSSION

This study examined how in-service English teachers narrate their identity transitions as they move into AI-enhanced classrooms. Three findings warrant extended discussion.

Transition as Narrative Reconstruction, Not Technical Problem-Solving

The first finding is conceptual but consequential: teachers experienced the transition to AI classrooms not primarily as a technical challenge (how to operate tools, where to insert them into lessons) but as a narrative crisis—a disturbance in the story of who they are as professionals and why their work matters. This finding aligns with transition theory's emphasis on meaning-making (Bridges, 2019; Hunter & Smith, 2023) and extends it into the specific domain of AI integration.

The practical implication disrupts prevailing professional development models. Most district training focuses on tool operation, lesson planning templates, and usage metrics. What teachers in this study needed—and rarely received—was structured opportunity for narrative work: telling stories of what they were losing, hearing colleagues' parallel struggles, jointly imagining revised professional identities that could incorporate AI without collapsing. Districts that treat AI integration as technical training will generate reluctant adapters performing compliance without coherence. Districts that also support narrative reconstruction may generate pragmatic negotiators capable of situated, thoughtful integration.

Typology as Diagnostic and Developmental Tool

The four narrative types identified—reluctant adapter, AI evangelist, pragmatic negotiator, anxious skeptic—offer a diagnostic framework for understanding teacher responses to AI. But they should not be used rigidly or evaluatively. Several participants, especially at the 18-month point, showed movement between types. Marcus shifted from skeptic to evangelist. Amara moved from cautious experimenter to pragmatic negotiator. Even Patricia, the most stable type, shifted from active resistance to contained refusal.

This suggests that narrative types may represent waypoints in a developmental trajectory rather than fixed dispositions. Professional development might productively help teachers identify their current narrative positioning, explore its affordances and limitations, and consider what would be required to shift toward pragmatic negotiation—the type that, in this study, produced the most flexible, evidence-responsive, and ethically nuanced integration.

Ethical Unease as Professional Resource, Not Barrier

The third discussion point concerns the pervasiveness of ethical unease across all narrative types. This unease is often framed in policy discourse as resistance to be overcome—an obstacle to efficient implementation. Our findings suggest the opposite: teachers' ethical qualms about surveillance, data privacy, and learner autonomy represent professional judgment about conditions for good teaching. These qualms are not barriers to integration but resources for *better* integration—reminders that AI tools are not neutral and that teachers' primary duty is to student flourishing, not to technological fidelity.

The teachers who achieved most stable integration (Amara, Daniel, Marcus in later months) did not abandon ethical unease. They learned to hold it alongside pragmatic use, treating discomfort as a signal to pause, question, and adjust. Professional development that dismisses ethical concerns as "resistance" will drive anxious skeptics underground while failing to develop the ethical reasoning all teachers need. Professional development that surfaces and engages ethical concerns—"When is AI use actually harmful to learning? What data rights should we demand from vendors? How do we maintain student autonomy in AI-mediated classrooms?"—treats teachers as moral agents and strengthens, rather than bypasses, professional judgment.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations qualify these findings. The study's small sample (n=8) and single-district setting limit generalizability. The 18-month timeline, while longer than most AI transition studies, captures only early stabilization; longer-term narrative trajectories remain unknown. The sample lacked teachers from rural or under-resourced schools, where AI access and infrastructure differ markedly. Additionally, the study focused on English teachers specifically; transitions in other subjects (mathematics, science, social studies) may follow different patterns given domain-specific relationships with writing and automated reasoning.

Future research should pursue longitudinal narrative inquiry across diverse settings, comparing districts with different implementation policies (mandatory vs. opt-in vs. exploratory). Comparative studies of narrative types across subjects would identify

domain-specific versus general transition patterns. Finally, intervention studies should test whether narrative-oriented professional development (structured storytelling, peer narrative exchange, identity-focused coaching) produces more adaptive integration than technical training alone.

CONCLUSION

The eight teachers in this study did not simply adopt or resist AI. They narrated themselves through disruption, piecing together revised professional identities from fragments of craft knowledge, emergent technical skills, and enduring ethical commitments. Their stories resist both the techno-optimist fantasy that AI will liberate teachers from drudgery into creativity and the techno-pessimist nightmare that AI will render teachers obsolete. Instead, these teachers are learning something harder: how to teach alongside machines without becoming machines themselves, how to preserve what is distinctively human about language teaching while surrendering tasks that may not require a human after all.

For teacher education and professional development, the implication is clear: stop training teachers to use AI and start supporting teachers to narrate their relationship with AI. Help them articulate what they are losing and why it matters. Help them experiment and tell stories about what works. Help them hold ethical unease as a professional resource rather than a deficiency. The question is not whether AI will be in classrooms—it already is. The question is whether teachers will narrate that presence as degradation or as transformation, as loss or as repurposing. Narrative inquiry cannot answer that question for them. But it can help ensure that whatever answer emerges is told in teachers' own voices, on their own terms, with all the ambivalence and complexity that genuine professional judgment requires.

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