Becoming a Teacher: A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Beginning Teachers.

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In the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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We acknowledge and respect the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm/Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

This research explores the evolving professional identities of early career teachers in British Columbia through the lens of narrative inquiry. Drawing on the experiences of four teachers in their first five years of teaching, this study investigates how identity and agency intersect within the relational and institutional landscapes of the BC public education system. Through story circles, written narratives, and re-storying, participants shared and reflected on their experiences of becoming teachers, experiences marked by uncertainty, vulnerability, and moments of both constraint and transformation. Central to this inquiry is the recognition that identity is not static, but continuously formed in shared spaces of classrooms, staffrooms, and school communities. Narrative threads pull forward important considerations of authenticity, agency, and shared trauma", as participants navigated institutional expectations while striving to remain true to their values and selves. By attending closely to the stories teachers live by, and the spaces in which their identities unfold, we can better understand the challenges of beginning teaching, and the relational practices that sustain and support stories to stay by.

Keywords: New Teacher, Relational Agency, Ecological Agency, Authenticity, Trauma

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This dissertation is not only a reflection of my research, but also a testament to the many people who walked beside me along the way.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Dr. Ian E. Efford,

and to those who chose to become teachers.

Becoming: to find out what's inside you, to make your soul grow.

(Kurt Vonnegut, 2014, n.p.)

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Chapter 1: Narrative Beginnings

We all carry multiple identities; interwoven 'stories to live by' (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4) that unfold throughout our lives, each stepping forward at different times. As a teenager, engrossed in classical music, I became a music teacher. My mother was a piano teacher, and I would listen to her teach through the wall as I would simultaneously teach flute in my bedroom. While I had a strong desire to teach, I never wanted to be a classroom teacher. My education in a public school was a struggle, and I was able to only shine in music class. When I had children, I thought carefully about the school they should attend. Impressed by the philosophy of student-centered learning, I decided a Montessori school was where they should go. I was so impressed with this program that I applied to be a support person in a Montessori school. My plan was to become a Montessori teacher, but my life took another path.

My identity as a mother is the anchor that grounds all the stories I live by. Becoming and being a mother has always felt natural and has brought me great joy. When my children were young, we moved to California as a family for a year. During that year I embraced a new role of homeschooling my three girls. Despite doubts and pushbacks from family and friends, homeschooling became our path for seventeen years and it shaped my understanding of teaching and my stories to live by as a teacher.

In the beginning, my children and I didn't really know what homeschooling would look like. In many ways we made it up over time. Homeschooling ended up being a winding path of forest hikes, exploring tide pools, and alternative learning spaces. I remember visiting a nature museum in Walnut Creek, where I stumbled upon a pamphlet for homeschool classes. My eldest daughter was excited to try a class where she could make friends. Each week the teenagers would explore a different regional park with a nature guide. I thought this would

give me time to focus on my other children, with a toddler son in tow, and together we could explore our new home. What I found instead was a parking lot full of a community of homeschool parents, each balancing the needs of their “others”, just like me. Finding a sense of community amongst other parents was important for me.

Identity itself is an ever-emerging construct, a multifaceted and evolving representation of self. With time, I came to understand that my identity was shaped not only by societal roles and expectations, but also the ways individuals express themselves through language, clothing, cultural practices, gender expression, and the rich tapestry of life experiences. These elements of identity are not static; they shift and transform through internal reflection and interactions within broader social contexts and evolve through different experiences. Throughout my homeschooling years my story as a teacher bumped up against opposing views. My family thought math should only be done at the dining room table and not in a tree, people at a grocery store who thought it was outrageous a child should not be sitting in a desk in a school during a weekday. Sometimes these bumps were hard, and tension filled, while other times, they helped me see the importance of what I was doing.

Over the many years as a homeschool teacher, my identity shifted and grew. It was a challenge to keep up with the learning that was important to all my children. A pivotal moment in my homeschooling journey came when another mother said, *You don’t have to read everything your children read*. My girls were voracious readers, and I had been struggling to keep up. This small piece of advice allowed me to see my role from a different perspective and I felt a shift in my identity. It was one of many lessons shared among our community, insights that shaped our experiences and enriched our journey. Looking back, I am struck what was at the time such a casual comment.

Homeschooling was a true gift. It was not something we had been seeking out, instead we stumbled upon. The years shaped my children's and my stories to live by, and also inspired my Master of Education thesis, where I explored the fluid and sometimes overlapping roles of parent and teacher in a homeschooling environment. This journey of learning and growth continues to influence who I am today.

By the time I was writing my master's thesis, we had moved back to Canada, and I had realized my years of homeschooling were coming to an end. I could feel the transition period starting, initiated when my daughters started to leave home. My eldest daughter leaving home, challenged who I was and am becoming as a mother. Her leaving raised so many wonders for me: My children and I had been so close for so long and I wondered, how would this transition change our relationships? Where would our journeys lead us to? This was also the time when my marriage began to fall apart, further amplifying a search for who I am and am becoming. These profound changes made me question, what was my story to live by? As it turned out, this was the beginning of a new journey. Having lived through two abusive relationships, I had a deep seeded need to just be on my own. I started making friends, finding activities that brought me joy, and I started carving out my own space while navigating the trauma both my children and I had experienced within our family.

A turning point came when I was hired to run the Center for Outreach Education (CORE), a University of Victoria program that paired education students with children from the community who were struggling academically. One phone call changed my life. In that role, I thrived. The program became a great success, yet little recognition for the work was provided by the Faculty of Education. This tension was in contrast to the recognition I received from parents, students, program directors and investors and challenged my identity within the department.

At CORE, the initial ideas of my doctoral research started to emerge. I listened to education students, mostly young women, share their experiences of their classes and practicums. I listened to their struggles and wondered why the system had so many obstacles; why was it so difficult to become a teacher I wondered. These were passionate young people aching to make a difference in their future classrooms. The experience of struggling to find my own identity, instilled a curiosity in me about the identity development of new teachers. I had increasingly become aware of the importance of bringing new teacher stories forward. In doing so, I hoped to make change.

Being a PhD student and university instructor has never come easily to me. Balancing these two intertwined identities has often felt daunting. With little support or guidance over the years, it was easy to set my work aside and let self-doubt take over. It took me five years to stand in front of a classroom full of university education students without feeling like an imposter. I knew how to teach. I was confident navigating educational spaces, but the formal classroom never felt like home. As a sessional instructor I often felt out of my depth, sometimes even challenged by students who seemed to know more than I did.

Two experiences in particular stand out. One student, who identified as male, was consistently disruptive, speaking under his breath just loud enough to question my ability to teach. One day, his determination to undermine me reached a peak. I couldn't hold my composure, and I ended the class early. Having been in an abusive relationship, my ability to stand up to a man was fragile. I retreated to the sessional office, waiting until I thought it was safe to leave without the possibility of running into him. When I finally stepped into the hallway, I ran into another student who asked to speak with me. I hesitated, barely holding it together, but we ended up back in the sessional office. She shared that the rest of the class did not agree with

the disruptive student and that they stood by me. Her kindness and honesty were a lifeline, grounding me in their trust of my teaching ability.

From the same class, the other memorable student was a woman older than the others who had been a teacher in Germany. She often felt compelled to elaborate on my lessons, often sharing information I had planned for my next slide. Her interruptions became irritating, challenging my role within the classroom. I struggled to find ways to address her behavior and the impact this had on me. Even though I had taught hundreds of students, these two experiences were both difficult and defining. As I look back on these experiences, I can see that each moment of vulnerability and each gesture of support contributed to the gradual growth of my confidence. I continue to learn what it means to inhabit the role of an instructor authentically, allowing these layered stories of who I am to emerge and guide me forward.

I have struggled to find my authentic self, only really knowing that feeling of authenticity as a mother and a homeschool teacher. With time, I wondered about the trauma embedded within these teaching experiences that happen in a formal classroom. As I gently reflect on my own experiences with trauma, I realize that I didn't initially use the word trauma when sharing my story. It was only through conversations with friends and my children that I began to embrace this word; I wonder about the link that exists between what is more commonly referred to as abuse and trauma. Through reflection and my yoga practice, I gradually explored how my experience with trauma linked to my identity development. My lived trauma has influenced my choices, sometimes causing me to shy away from things. It took time to become comfortable with the term and to understand my relationship with it.

Through my journey I have come to understand how storytelling and reflection can positively impact the lives and experiences of teachers. Having the opportunity to hear the

identity stories of early career teachers is important to me. As I wrote my narrative beginnings, I was reminded how shaping my early years as a teacher were in my life and how easily the complexities and relationships with other teachers, students and parents can shape our decisions to stay or leave the profession. My own stories and desires shaped the puzzle[1] of this narrative inquiry, where I wondered about the experiences of becoming teachers. I wondered how teachers navigate their first five years in the profession. What shaped their identity making? What sustained their stories to live by? What informed their stories to leave by? I hoped to gain understandings that may highlight opportunities to enhance BC University Teacher Education programs and other institutional programs and policies by offering more targeted support that addresses the specific opportunities and challenges new teachers face, and who they are becoming as teachers.

In Chapter 2, I will review the literature most closely related to my research puzzle. Insights into the methodology of narrative inquiry will be provided in Chapter 3. Following, in Chapter 4, I will share a collective narrative account of the participants and my experiences. The analysis pieces, which are represented as resonant narrative threads are shown in Chapter 5. This Chapter is followed by insights into the personal, practical, and social significance of this work.

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[1] In narrative inquiry, research questions are not developed. Instead, the focus of the work is on a research puzzle, which can be composed of multiple questions and wonders that frame the broader field of the study. Using the word question often presumes one will find answers, which is not an assumption that guides narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

While my research puzzle is framed broadly about the experiences of beginning teachers, it is important to recognize that a clear understanding of existing research on teacher identity is crucial for positioning this study within the broader academic discourse. Identity formation has been examined through historical, socio-cultural, and developmental lenses. Though complex to define, identity is a fundamental aspect of human experience. Identities are continuously unfolding over a lifetime and shaped by experiences, places and contexts.

Historical perspectives on identity development have evolved through various academic disciplines, including psychology, philosophy, and sociology. Key theorists and frameworks provide foundational perspectives on identity development including Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental Theory (Erikson, 1968); Dewey's Experiential Learning Theory (Dewey, 1938); Vygotsky Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978); Kholberg's Theory of Moral Development (Kohlberg, 1981); and Bandura's Theory of Identity Development (Bandura, 1977), which is grounded in his broader social cognitive theory. Each of these theorists offers a unique perspective on identity formation, emphasizing its dynamic and evolving nature. These perspectives, including a development perspective, a socio-cultural perspective, and narrative perspective, continue to shape contemporary research on identity development in various fields, including teacher identity development.

Developmental Perspective

In *Adolescence and the Problem of Identity*, Kroger (2004) examines five developmental models of identity formation, providing a foundation for understanding how new teachers develop their professional identities. Over the past four decades, research into identity has expanded significantly, as reflected in textbooks, professional societies, and journal publications.

Kroger (2004) explores the work of Erik Erikson, Peter Blos, Lawrence Kohlberg, Jane Loevinger, and Robert Kegan, noting that their approaches to identity are “more qualitative in kind and developmental in form” (p. 8). By viewing identity as developmental rather than static, identity can be understood as a balance between self-perception and external influences.

Kohlberg (1981) approached identity through the lens of moral reasoning, arguing that identity development follows an underlying developmental trajectory. Loevinger (1987) took a holistic view, emphasizing self-other differentiation and highlighting how young adults develop an appreciation for individuality and deeper mutuality in relationships. Kegan (1982) describes identity development as a lifelong process of meaning-making, in which individuals continually renegotiate their understanding of self and other within their social contexts. Dewey’s (1938) perspective frames identity formation as an educational and experiential learning process. He emphasized the role of experience, reflection, and interaction with the environment in shaping a person’s sense of self, arguing that all experiences are connected and influence future learning and growth: “every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes” (p. 35). While Dewey conceives of development and identity as open, relational processes deeply situated in social and cultural experience, Kroger (2004) proposes a more structured approach, based on psychosocial stages and crises, in which identity is formed through personal exploration and commitment. Both recognize the role of the social environment, but Dewey places greater emphasis on collective experience and situated action, while Kroger focuses on internal processes and their resolutions throughout life.

These developmental and experiential perspectives on identity formation extends to the professional identity of teachers. Kelchtermans (2009) argues that throughout their careers, teachers develop a personal interpretative framework, a set of cognitions and mental

representations that serve as a lens for understanding, meaning-making, and action in their work. This concept aligns with Dewey's idea of learning from experience over time through interaction, positioning identity as both dynamic and biographical. From my experiences I can see that the development of teacher identity is further made complex by societal expectations, institutional constraints, and personal beliefs, all of which influence teachers' authenticity, job motivation, and relationships within the profession.

In *Teacher Professional Identity and Career Motivation: A Lifespan Perspective*, Richardson and Watt (2018) acknowledge the challenges of researching the "formation and development of teacher professional identity" due to its "multidimensional contextualized character," which is reflected in the variety of conceptual and methodological perspectives used to examine identity-related processes (p. 37). They highlight that professional identity can be explored through multiple disciplines, including philosophy, psychology, anthropology, neuroscience, and sociology. This multidimensionality reflects the fluid and negotiated nature of teacher identity, shaped by ongoing interactions between personal beliefs, social relationships, and broader systemic forces. In addition to a developmental perspective, a social-cultural perspective offers us new insights into questions of identity.

Social-Cultural Perspective

Within the social-cultural perspective, identity is understood as constructed over time through relationships, experiences, and personal schemas, reflecting the interaction between individuals and their social, historical, and cultural contexts. As Kroger (2004) notes, identity is deeply embedded in one's social and cultural surroundings, shaped by external influences and internal meaning-making processes. Clandinin et. al (2017) identify three core dimensions of identity learning, which includes development, sense-making, and agency. Development refers to

an individual's ability to assert and evolve their identity over time, playing a crucial role in how student teachers engage with their education programs. Sense-making involves the integration of new learning experiences with pre-existing beliefs and knowledge, shaping how student teachers interpret and construct their professional identity. These dimensions offer a valuable framework for understanding how new teachers navigate the complexities of identity formation within their professional journeys and assert agency. Beijaard et al. (2004) further emphasize that teacher identity is not static but an ongoing, dynamic process influenced by personal, professional, and contextual factors.

The complexity of defining and examining teacher identity is further explored in Dotger and Smith's (2009) study, "*Where's the Line? Negotiating Simulated Experiences to Define Teacher Identity.*" Their research highlights the disconnect between teacher education and real-world practice, particularly in preparing new teachers for effective communication with parents and caregivers. They argue that many teacher education programs fail to provide opportunities for preservice teachers to develop these essential relationships, leaving novice teachers unprepared to foster meaningful connections with students and families. Parent-teacher communication is just one example of the broader challenges involved in the formation of a teacher's professional identity, demonstrating the need for more integrated and experiential learning opportunities in teacher education.

Expanding on the broader context of teacher preparation, *The Continuum of Preservice and Inservice Teacher Education* (Beck & Kosnik, 2017), a chapter in *The Sage Handbook of Research on Teacher Education*, advocates for a holistic, constructivist approach that links preservice and in-service teacher education into a seamless continuum of professional learning. Despite growing recognition of the importance of integrating social and educational theory,

teacher education worldwide remains largely transmission-based (Beck & Kosnik, 2017). The authors propose greater continuity, coordination, and coherence between preservice and in-service programs to bridge this gap and support long-term professional identity development. By fostering stronger connections between teacher education institutions and the broader educational community, this model lays the foundation for lifelong learning and professional growth. Key elements of this approach include incorporating 21st-century skills, such as personal, social, cultural, and aesthetic development into teacher education, alongside structural changes like smaller class sizes that encourage social interaction and diverse learning opportunities (Beck & Kosnik, 2017). Additionally, formative assessment strategies that scaffold knowledge across a teacher's career can help educators reflect on their evolving professional identity through past experiences, self-assessment, and clear success criteria (Clark, 2010).

Becoming a teacher is a complex and deeply interwoven process that blends personal and professional dimensions. This journey is shaped by interactions with relevant others, institutional resources, and various teaching and learning materials (Clandinin et. al. 2017). A teacher's identity is closely tied to their beliefs, which influence their actions in the classroom. As new teachers embrace their professional roles, their beliefs about teaching evolve to align with their developing sense of self within the profession. During this transition, teachers may experience tensions between their pre-existing perceptions of teaching and the realities of professional practice. Alsup (2006) describes this as a process of integrating personal beliefs with professional demands, ultimately shaping a belief system that defines teacher identity. New teachers often feel caught between their past as students and their present as educators, negotiating their emerging professional identities while remaining influenced by their home discourse communities, those they engage with outside of the school setting, such as family and friends (Alsup, 2006).

Authenticity is another crucial dimension of teacher identity within a social cultural perspective, as it reflects the integration of personal beliefs with professional practice. Ramezanzadeh et al. (2017) explore the ways authenticity is understood and enacted in pedagogical practice, identifying key themes such as selfhood, pedagogical relationships, contestation, and ultimate meaning. Similarly, Sutherland and Markauskaite (2012) examine how authentic learning experiences facilitate the transition from student to professional practitioner, emphasizing the role of engagement within a community of practice. Kreber et al. (2007) further investigate the concept of authenticity in teaching, highlighting its multiple interpretations, including being one's authentic self, integrating personal and professional identities, resisting external expectations, and engaging in critical reflection to connect with students and colleagues.

Kearney (2013), in *On Becoming a Teacher*, underscores the importance of self-awareness, stating, "One of the most powerful tools you have as a teacher is yourself" (p. 11). This aligns with the idea that authenticity is deeply connected to a teacher's ability to integrate their beliefs and values into their professional identity. Effective educators cultivate this self-awareness and use it to enhance student learning. By sharing their authentic selves, teachers can inspire students and model the learning process in meaningful ways. Furthermore, Kearney argues that a teacher's authenticity in the classroom is directly linked to their ability to motivate and empower students: "Students who believe you are genuine and authentic begin to watch you more closely" (p. 12). Authentic teaching requires knowing oneself deeply, feeling comfortable with one's identity, and openly sharing that with students. Students are highly perceptive and quickly recognize authenticity, or the lack of it. They respond positively to genuine self-expression and disengage when they sense artificiality or insincerity. More than following any

prescribed teaching style, what matters most is that a teacher's identity in the classroom aligns with who they are as people.

The presence of authenticity in teaching is marked by a teacher's sense of responsibility, pedagogical awareness, and capacity for self-reflection, whereas inauthenticity is often linked to teacher-centered instruction, rigid classroom structures, and traditional assessment methods. Ramezanzadeh et al. (2017) reinforce that authenticity is not a fixed state but a continuous process of becoming, allowing teachers to deepen their understanding of both them and their students. However, the concept of authenticity in teaching is complex and multifaceted, as explored by Bialystok (2015) in *Should Teachers Be Authentic?* She notes that "authenticity has become a highly fashionable subject in education" (p. 313) but questions its actual implications. Defining authenticity as being "aligned in its identity; it is self-identical; it is what it says it is" (p. 314), she argues that authenticity is not merely about being oneself but about actively shaping the self one wishes to be.

While authenticity is frequently linked to effective teaching, engaging students through genuine dialogue and a deep care for the subject matter (Kreber et al., 2007), it is not a fixed quality but a socially mediated process. Authenticity in teaching is shaped by individual identity, social relationships, institutional pressures, and broader power structures. Ongoing research continues to refine our understanding of what it means to be an authentic teacher and how educators navigate tensions between selfhood and professional expectations. Critical perspectives challenge traditional notions of authenticity, arguing that dominant discourses often reflect privileged identities, overlooking the lived experiences of teachers from diverse racial, cultural, and gendered backgrounds. These discussions underscore the complexities of identity

development in teaching, highlighting the need for inclusive and reflexive approaches to understanding what it means to be an authentic educator.

Discussions on teacher authenticity often conflate authenticity with other character traits or equate it with teacher effectiveness (Bialystok, 2015). Bialystok (2015) challenges this assumption, highlighting that while authenticity may contribute to strong teaching practices, it is also possible for exceptional teachers to be inauthentic and for ineffective, or even harmful, teachers to embody authenticity. Through an analysis of three case studies, she illustrates that the relationship between authenticity and good teaching is more complex and less direct than it may initially seem. This perspective adds nuance to the broader discourse on teacher identity, emphasizing that while authenticity can enrich professional practice, it must be critically examined within the larger framework of pedagogical effectiveness and ethical responsibility.

Together, these perspectives underscore the fluid and evolving nature of teacher identity. From the foundational processes of ownership, sense-making, and agency to the challenges of integrating personal beliefs with professional expectations, teacher identity emerges as a dynamic and contextually embedded construct. By fostering authentic learning experiences and bridging the gap between preservice education and real-world practice, teacher education programs can better support novice teachers in developing a coherent and sustainable professional identity.

A Narrative Understanding of Teacher Identity Making

Within the context of teacher education, identity formation is a dynamic and multifaceted process shaped by both past and present experiences. Schaefer and Clandinin (2018) describe teacher education as an identity-making process, where preservice teachers engage in “forward-looking stories” that help define who they are and who they are becoming as educators (p. 55).

This process is influenced by how new teachers perceive themselves in their professional roles, which is shaped by their own educational experiences, the teachers they have encountered, and the mentors they work with during teacher education and practicum experiences. Cherrington (2017) further emphasizes the role of contextual factors, including educational environments, prior experiences, learning communities, and relationships with colleagues, parents, and students in shaping teacher identity.

Beijaard et al. (2004) categorize research on teacher professional identity into three main areas: (1) studies on identity formation, (2) studies identifying key characteristics of professional identity, and (3) narrative-based research exploring how professional identity is represented through teachers' personal stories (p. 107). Within the narrative-based research, the authors highlight Brooke (1994) and Connelly and Clandinin (1999), all of whom emphasize that professional identity making is deeply intertwined with lived experiences and that the personal and professional selves should not be viewed as separate. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) introduce the concept of 'stories to live by', reinforcing the connection between knowledge, context, and identity. However, they also note a gap in the literature, where many studies fail to explicitly connect educational theories with professional identity, which has significant implications for future research.

Expanding on this perspective, Alsup (2016) explores teacher identity through the lens of discourse, authority, and vulnerability, drawing on Kegan's theory of identity construction. She describes identity as an ongoing process of balancing self and other, aligning with Erikson's developmental theory, which views identity formation as a lifelong negotiation between self-perception and societal expectations. This cyclical process of balance and imbalance underscores the complexities of teacher identity development.

Connelly (2000) introduces a three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework to conceptualize teacher knowledge, consisting of temporality, personal/existential dimensions, and place. Temporality recognizes that teacher knowledge is dynamic, shaped by both past experiences and future possibilities. The personal/existential dimension emphasizes that all knowledge is influenced by personal perspectives. Place refers to the environment in which teaching occurs, shaping and being shaped by teacher narratives. Connelly (2000) further distinguishes between teachers' professional knowledge landscapes, the broader educational context including policies, curriculum, and institutional expectations, and personal practical knowledge, which emerges from lived experience in the classroom.

A central concept in this framework is the idea of nested stories. Connelly (2000) explains, "[l]andscape is a nest of stories into which one fits and becomes a character" (p. 323). Connelly identifies three types of teacher stories: secret stories, which are in-classroom narratives known only to the teacher and students; cover stories, which are publicly told narratives shaped by external expectations; and sacred stories, which reflect dominant educational ideologies, such as the belief that theory dictates practice. This narrative lens highlights the fluidity of teacher knowledge, shaped by experience, context, and the stories teachers construct throughout their careers.

Kelchtermans (2017) similarly underscores the centrality of teacher identity in professional practice. Through a decade of research informed by teacher thinking and narrative-biographical approaches, he presents a conceptual framework that includes professional self-understanding and subjective educational theory. These elements shape a teacher's interpretative framework through reflective engagement with their social, cultural, and structural work environments. Kelchtermans argues that teacher professionalism is deeply connected to personal

commitment and vulnerability, influencing the reflective attitudes and skills educators cultivate. He asserts that a teacher's identity is at the core of both the classroom and the broader educational process; he highlights that "[i]t matters who a teacher is" (p. 258). This aligns with the scholarship of teaching, which emphasizes public engagement, critical peer review, and contributions to professional knowledge. As a forward-facing profession, teaching places a teacher's authentic self under constant scrutiny by students, colleagues, institutions, and society at large.

Teacher attrition is an increasing concern in Canada, with many educators leaving the profession within their first few years (Schaefer et al., 2021). Research identifies contributing factors such as heavy workloads, limited professional autonomy, inadequate support, work-life balance challenges, a performative school culture, and emotional exhaustion (Plust et al., 2022; Schaefer et al., 2018). High attrition rates disrupt student learning and place additional strain on school communities and education systems. Schaefer and Clandinin (2018) examine these complex causes through studies focused on new teachers' stories to live by, highlighting both systemic and contextual factors that shape teacher retention. They emphasize that teacher educators must consider the multiple demands placed on new teachers by classrooms, schools, communities, parents, and their own families, all of which influence their developing professional identities.

The formation of a teacher's professional identity plays a crucial role in supporting teacher retention and job satisfaction. I*n Sustaining Teachers' Stories to Live By: Implications for Teacher Education*, Schaefer and Clandinin (2018) argue that contextual factors, including demographic characteristics, family responsibilities, burnout susceptibility, and psychological traits, must be considered when examining teacher attrition. They suggest that teacher education

programs should better support teachers' forward-looking stories to help them sustain their professional identities and remain in the field. Addressing this question requires a deeper exploration of how identity formation, professional expectations, and institutional support intersect to shape teachers' long-term commitment to the profession.

Educator identities are fluid and continually evolving, shaped by the multiple roles they occupy, whether as parents, schoolteachers, homeschool educators, coaches, or university professors. The growth and development of teachers are central to the future of society, as their identities shift and adapt within the diverse contexts in which they teach (Garmer & Kaplan, 2019).

Teaching is a profession marked by complexity and constant change. It is dynamic and often unpredictable, requiring new teachers to navigate a challenging landscape where they must perform alongside seasoned professionals (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dotger & Smith, 2009; Leggo, 2010; Richardson & Watt, 2018). New educators face the task of managing diverse classrooms, responding to varied student needs, engaging with parents, and meeting institutional expectations, all while negotiating their own identity within their professional practice. This journey of becoming a teacher is not linear, but an ongoing process in which every experience, relationship, and moment of reflection contributes to the unfolding story of who they are as educators (Clandinin et. al. 2017).

However, the teaching profession is often oversimplified due to our shared experience of public education. Many assume they understand what a teacher is and does (Britzman, 2003, p. 27). This stereotypical image, of a teacher who is often female, self-sacrificing, kind, overworked, and patient, emerges from years of observing teacher identity, shaped by both personal and institutional histories. As Clandinin et. al. (2021) note, "[w]ho one is as a person is

strongly interwoven with how one works as a professional. Both dimensions together represent one's teacher identity" (p. 2).

Relational and Ecological Agency

Relational agency and ecological agency are interconnected concepts that both emphasize how individuals act and make meaning within socially and materially embedded contexts. While distinct in focus, they are similar in how agency is distributed, negotiated, and enacted in relation to others and the environment. The concept of relational agency (Edwards, 2006) is used to describe how individuals work collaboratively by recognizing and responding to the motives, knowledge, and resources of others. In education, this means that teachers' agency is not exercised in isolation but is co-constructed through interactions with students, colleagues, policies, and communities. Relational agency values responsiveness, mutuality, and professional interdependence. Ecological agency expands this relational view by placing agency within a broader landscape of time, place, relationships, and institutional structures. Clandinin et al. (2006; 2016) and Priestley et al. (2015) conceptualize ecological agency as a temporal, situated, and socially mediated phenomenon, where teachers' capacity to act is shaped by personal history, current context, and imagined futures. It acknowledges both individual voice and structural constraints, emphasizing how agency is lived through navigating systems, stories, and relationships.

Despite the complexity of the work, much of it remains invisible and misunderstood. Education is inherently relational, and a key element of a strong educational program is the interconnectedness and reciprocal roles of students, parents, and teachers. Building relationships in this context involves personal and social awareness, a deep understanding of teacher identity, and the importance of acknowledging and incorporating alternative ways of knowing into all

areas of education. Historically, teacher education programs have not focused on developing teacher identity. However, two critical aspects of a new teacher's identity have been recognized: first, "the beliefs that student teachers bring with them [a new teacher's identity] as they enter teacher education," and second, "the tensions that may arise with student teachers through the interplay between internal and external forces" that shape their identity (Beijaard & Meijer, 2017, p. 178).

A Turn Towards Narrative Inquiry

Research on early-career teacher identity emphasizes how newly qualified teachers continue to shape and reshape their professional identities in response to real-world classroom experiences, school cultures, and systemic pressures. Flores and Day (2006) show that early-career identity is dynamic and often challenged by tensions between initial ideals formed during teacher education and the practical demands of the profession. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) highlight how ongoing reflection, support, and context play a significant role in sustaining or reshaping identity during this critical phase. Izadinia (2013) underscores the importance of mentorship and professional relationships in helping early-career teachers build confidence and a sense of belonging. These studies collectively demonstrate that the early years of teaching are a pivotal time for identity development, with implications for teacher retention, resilience, and professional growth.

Narrative inquiry as phenomenon recognizes that experience is fundamentally narrative in nature, and studying those experiences means attending to how stories are constructed, shared, and lived across time and place. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe narrative inquiry as a way of studying experience in the midst of living it, emphasizing that stories are both a method and the phenomenon. Narrative inquiry as a phenomenon refers to the understanding that lived

experience itself is storied, that is, people make sense of their lives and identities through the stories they tell and live.

A focus on the development of a professional identity has been defined as an important aspect for beginning teachers (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2018). This calls for methodologies that allow teachers to describe their early teaching experiences, with narrative inquiry offering a way to engage with identity as a lived and storied phenomenon, one that is socially constructed and continually shaped through the experiences educators live, tell, and retell across personal and professional contexts (Clandinin et al., 2015). Research into the construction of identity of new teachers needs to focus on experience and acknowledge "the tangled complexity of lived experience" (Leggo, 2010, p. 99). By choosing to use narrative inquiry as a methodology, there is an opportunity to focus on experiences and to inquire into both professional and personal experiences of beginning teachers (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In the following chapter I will highlight narrative inquiry as my methodological approach.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Using narrative inquiry, I explored the following research puzzle that is centered on the experiences of becoming teachers. I wondered how teachers navigate their first five years in the profession. What shaped their identity making? What sustained their stories to live by? What informed their stories to leave by? Doing so allowed me to understand experiences through story. As Clandinin and Connelly (2006) point out:

> Story is a portal through which their experience of the world enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then is first and foremost a way of thinking about experiences. (p. 477)

Narrative inquiry can offer a more complete understanding of new teachers' transition to practice, a space for new teachers' voices and a new perspective for the implementation of policies and teacher education programs that better support new teachers and reduce teacher attrition (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2018). Educators have researched teacher education and teaching practice from various points of view, including institutionalized design, program design and practices of inquiry and reflection. Schaefer and Clandinin (2018) expand this list to include the responsibility of teacher educators to work with new teachers to "shape their forward-looking stories of who they are and who they are becoming as teachers, their identities, their stories to live by" (p. 55).

Considering whether new teachers form their professional identity through storied experience, such as memories of a favorite teacher or classroom, or their experiences with students adds depth to our understanding of how identity develops within the teaching

profession. Narrative inquiry emphasizes the power of storytelling in meaning-making, identity formation, and knowledge transmission.

Kelchtermans (2009) emphasizes that narratives are a powerful way to unravel and understand the complex processes of sense-making in teaching. Teachers often frame their reflections on professional life and practice in narrative form, using storytelling to make sense of their experiences. This aligns well with narrative inquiry, a methodology developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) to describe an emerging approach to teacher education research that focuses on storytelling. Narrative inquiry, a qualitative research method, explores the significance of personal experiences within multifaceted contexts, using stories to capture the nuances of those experiences. Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) note that storytelling has rapidly gained legitimacy in educational research, highlighting its power to offer diverse perspectives often overlooked by other research methods. As these authors explain, when we reflect on life, we tend to think narratively, demonstrating how deeply intertwined storytelling is with human cognition.

In this research methodology, narratives serve as a vehicle for gaining a deeper understanding of complex, interconnected stories within educational settings. By honoring voices and perspectives that may otherwise remain silent, narrative inquiry respects lived experiences, recognizing them as valuable sources of knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). In this way, narrative inquiry offers a lens through which educators and researchers can explore and understand the intricacies of teaching and learning, reinforcing the importance of personal stories in shaping educational knowledge.

Dewey's (1938) concept of interaction and continuity has shaped the three-dimensional inquiry space: temporality, sociality, and place. As researchers, we must recognize the fluidity of an individual's life, which shapes the context in which a story unfolds. "Dewey's criteria of

experience, interaction, and continuity, enacted in situations, provide the grounding for the attention in the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space to temporality, place and sociality" (Candinin & Caine, 2013, p. 176). Dewey's framework enables narratives to be situated within the layered complexities of lived experience (Clandinin & Caine, 2013).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) apply Dewey's framework as a primary means of engaging with participants and analyzing experiences, emphasizing three key aspects: interaction, continuity, and situation. Interaction involves both personal and social dimensions, incorporating the perspectives of others (Ollerenshaw & Cresswell, 2002). It "is a way of conceptualizing experience narratively" (Clandinin et al., 2015, p. 24). Continuity, or temporality, is central to narrative inquiry, as past experiences inform the interpretation of participants' stories. "Lives are always nested within social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which each individual's experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted" (Caine et al, 2022, p. 63). Place is equally significant, as the physical and contextual settings shape the storytellers and their narratives. A narrative, therefore, serves as a structured framework that holds a story, often reflecting a particular purpose or perspective.

The terms story and narrative are often used interchangeably but they have different contextual meanings within research. The term story can be interpreted as how someone interprets their experience and attaches personal meaning to that experience. Stories do not exist in isolation. Socio-narratology is described as "expanding the study of literary narratives" (Alsup, 2006, p. 12). From a very young age, we are taught through stories and being competent in story telling is a part of being human. Narratology is the expansion of the study of narratives which examines various narrative forms and their significance within their specific context. In his work *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio-Narratology*, Frank (2010) explores the societal role of

stories. Frank (2010) emphasizes the impact of stories, sharing that “human life depends on the stories we tell: the sense of self that those stories impart, the relationship constructed around shared stories, and the sense of purpose that stories both propose and foreclose” (p. 3).

Narrative inquiry offers the opportunity to explore the experience of new teachers, providing a depth of understanding that reflects the complex world of teaching. A narrative inquiry design provides deeper insight into the experiences of beginning teachers as they navigate their personal and professional knowledge landscapes (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2019). Teaching is inherently collaborative, and in educational research, narratives have proven effective in understanding the layered pedagogical experiences (Alsup, 2006). A teacher’s role involves navigating multi-layered relationships with students, within a classroom, school, and a community. Each of these expectations requires a teacher to engage in identity development. Creswell (2008) emphasizes that people “tell stories to share their lives with others and to provide their personal accounts about classrooms, school, educational issues and the setting in which they work” (p. 511). The stories emerging from these life experiences can offer valuable insights into the journey of new teachers.

Narratives play a powerful role in shaping our understanding of ourselves and the world around us, but not all narratives serve us well. Some narratives perpetuate harmful beliefs, keeping individuals trapped in false directions or reinforcing limiting social and cultural assumptions (White & Epston, 1990). These narratives, whether internalized or imposed by society, can obscure critical reflection and prevent growth. The process of inquiring into these narratives such as identifying embedded biases, assumptions, or outdated beliefs, is not only essential for personal development but also constitutes a significant area of research in fields like psychology, education, and cultural studies (Bruner, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This

inquiry allows for a more nuanced and authentic understanding of identity, agency, and social positioning. Researchers have demonstrated that critical reflection on personal narratives can uncover the hidden ways in which individuals conform to societal expectations or remain bound by inherited ideologies (Mezirow, 1991). By challenging these beliefs through narrative inquiry, individuals can reconstruct more authentic and liberated identities, a process central to both personal transformation and scholarly exploration (Andrews et al., 2008; Clandinin, 2013).

Alsup (2006) explains a connection between narrative and identity asserting that "many psychologists, sociologists, and educators assert that personal narratives do not simply reflect identities, they are people's identities" (p. 53). In other words, personal stories are not just about identity; they constitute people's identities. Therefore, analyzing people's shared stories is "one way of understanding identity development" (Alsup, 2006, p. 53). Bruner (2004) further emphasized that people live storied lives. Storytelling, in this context, is the expression of self which we, as humans use to represent our experiences to ourselves and to others.

Narrative Identity Making: Methodological Implications

As Clandinin et al. (2015) point out, "[p]eople shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories" (p. 24). According to Bruner (2004) narratives play an important role in constructing identities as we "construct ourselves autobiographically" through story telling (p. 692). Moen (2006) equates stories to meaningful segments of our lives which organize the events and experiences of our lives in a purposeful, impactful way. Life narratives reflect a constructed nature and are dependent upon the cultural and language conventions (Bruner, 2004). Moen (2006) describes life as "a narrative inside which we find a number of other stories" (p. 56). Moen's places narrative research within a sociocultural framework and suggests that human beings learn and develop in the process

between the individual and society, belonging to a group and participating in the construction of knowledge. Sociocultural theory, a form of social constructivism, emphasizes the interconnectedness of the mind and world.

When considering teacher identity development narratively, identity is not a fixed attribute, but a relational event (Beijaard et al., 2004). A person's identity is created within the perception of self, within the context of interactions between oneself and others. Emotions arise from various aspects of teachers' professional lives, including classroom teaching, relationships with colleagues, and interactions with parents, shaping and reshaping their identities as educators (Yuan & Lee, 2016). The understanding of context brings into question the importance of the holistic nature of storytelling, asking the questions: Who is telling the story and to whom? Are they telling their own story or re-storying an event? How is the story framed in time and place? Leggo (2010) includes in the experience of narrative: "imagination, heart, intellect, memory, courage, and wisdom which shape the stories meaningfully" (p. 101) and broadens the definition of holistic. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasizes that stories are fluid and co-constructed because there is a teller and a listener. The interaction between storyteller and listener, along with the internal experience of both telling and hearing a story, intertwines lived experience with identity development. When considering the identity formation of new teachers, we can see them as being 'in the midst' (Caine et al., 2022) of becoming, continuously shaping their stories to live by (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2018), the narratives that define their identities. Schoen (1983) emphasizes the importance of retelling stories as a means of understanding and learning from experience. He argues that retelling stories allows individuals to make sense and understand their lived experience.

By inquiring into stories, it is possible to reflect a broader collective experience (Clandinin, 2013). Clandinin and Caine (2013), point out that "[o]ur retold and relived stories are composed in the tensions of telling, living and retelling, tensions that hold the fabric of our lives together, that allow us to recompose and restory our experiences in new ways" (p. 176). As a methodology, narrative inquiry allows for the emergence of counter-narratives that can challenge limiting or oppressive structures, offering participants agency in redefining their life trajectories.

Participants

The target population for this research is comprised of new teachers working within the British Columbia (BC) education system, all of whom graduated from the University of Victoria's Department of Education with either a Degree in Education or a BC teaching certificate from the Post-Degree Program. All participants in this study graduated within the past six years. For this study, a new teacher was defined as an individual who completed their first year of teaching but has no more than five years of experience. I received ethical approval for my study through the Ethics Board at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada (Appendix A).

I received six responses to my call for participants, however two participants decided to decline to participate due to scheduling issues and illness. The final group of participants was four. The participants represented diverse demographic characteristics, including female, male, and queer identities, that teach in both public and alternative schools. Participants brought 1-5 years of teaching experience from various parts of Vancouver Island on Canada's west coast, with some having pursued additional qualifications, such as a Master's in Education, Educational Leadership, Elementary Special Education and Teacher Librarian Certificate.

Recruitment Process

Participants were recruited through the University of Victoria's Department of Education by sending emails to graduates from 2018 to 2022. Six individuals responded, and four were available to participate in the study. After confirming their participation and sharing the letter of consent (Appendix B), I scheduled an initial online orientation meeting. All four participants attended, where I provided an overview of the study, answered questions, and coordinated a suitable time for a story circle. I also asked that participants engaged in writing about their experiences prior to meeting in the story circle. Additionally, we established a plan for each participant to upload their story to a Teams account before the story circle session.

Collecting Field Texts

The field text for this study included participant stories, oral narrations of their experiences, written reflections, my re-storying of their original stories and their reflections, and my field notes. The research process began with an online orientation, during which I introduced the study, emphasizing the role of identity-building in the teaching profession. This meeting aimed to create a trusting environment for participants to share their *becoming a teacher* stories. I described the path the research would take: two in-person meetings at the university, a story circle and a circle to share the restorying and my field notes. These sessions, each lasting 2-3 hours and were held in June and September of 2023. One participant was absent from the second circle meeting due to illness and provided feedback via email.

Before the first meeting, participants shared their identity stories on Microsoft Teams, responding to the prompt: Please share a story from your teaching journey that illustrates your growing identity as a teacher. The purpose of this was to create a touchstone for the participants that connected them back to their own story during our story circle.

The first in-person meeting involved sharing particpant stories in a circle. The story circle discussions were recorded on my laptop, using Audacity to ensure clear transcriptions. After each participant shared their story, I asked for a few minutes of silence to give the opportunity for reflection. Following the final sharing, I asked the participants to spend some time writing a reflection of our shared experience. These reflections were uploaded to the same Microsoft Teams account as their original becoming story. As the participants sorted their belongings ready to go home after the second circle, a conversation developed which was not recorded. I took notes, with their permission. Participants were asked to choose a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality throughout the research process.

Circle Work

A key part of the field texts was engaging with participants in circles. These circles might be best described as focus group, although there are important distinctions. Circles were marked by key relational elements. In this study, participants were tasked with sharing a story with other new teachers, one that offers an understanding of how they actively construct identity and negotiate meaning around their own "becoming" as a teacher. Feminist research methods emphasize participatory, inclusive approaches that aim to dismantle traditional power hierarchies within research settings, creating space for voices that are often marginalized (Hess-Biber, 2014). Focus groups, a feminist methodology often used in qualitative research, offer a collective way to share experiences and distribute power during the research process (Kohli et at, 2015).

Feminist focus groups are based in a belief system of mutual reciprocity and the development of person and their identity over time (Munday, 2014, p. 233). Feminist qualitative research, including feminist focus groups are valuable research methods, as they engage with key aspects of feminist praxis, including experience, empowerment of marginalized groups, the

rejection of essentialism, and the examination of social constructs rather than predetermined norms. (Montell, 1999; Munday, 2014). The dynamics among participants in focus groups offer a valuable opportunity to explore issues of identity development (Montell, 1999). Important characteristics of a focus group include their "collective, interactive nature and are therefore a strong method to investigate" the construction of collective identities (Munday, 2014, p. 235). Identity as constructed is supported by the dialogic nature of gathering and in feminist focus group that explore the "social as constructed rather than pre-given" (Munday, 2014, p. 233).

Reflective Practice

Reflection, from a methods perspective, is a key qualitative research tool used to explore individuals' experiences, thoughts, and emotions in a structured manner. It involves the process of participants critically engaging with their own experiences, often through prompts or guided activities, to generate deeper insights about their personal or professional lives. As a method, reflection can take various forms, such as reflective journaling, where participants articulate their internal processes and consider how their experiences are shaped by broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts. Reflection is closely aligned with phenomenological and interpretive traditions in qualitative research, as it emphasizes the subjective nature of experience and the role of the individual in constructing meaning (Van Manen, 1990). Researchers using reflection as a method often encourage iterative cycles of revisiting and revising thoughts to help participants uncover new perspectives and challenge prior assumptions. The method also requires reflexivity on the part of the researcher, who must be aware of their influence on the reflective process. Overall, reflection enables a deeper, more nuanced understanding of participants' lived experiences and fosters self-awareness, making it a powerful tool for both personal growth and scholarly inquiry.

There are important parallels between narrative inquiry and reflection. Narrative inquiry centers the stories people tell about their lives and experience with the goal of better understanding how people construct meaning (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). Reflective inquiry (Schoen, 1983) focuses on the reflection of one's experiences with the goal of gaining insight into actions, beliefs and assumptions. Narrative inquiry aims to provide a deep, nuanced understanding of the experience of an individual within a social context such as how teachers' professional identities are constructed and shaped by their experiences and the stories they tell about these experiences. At the same time, "narrative inquiry reflects a deeply relational inquiry, and the relationship of the teller and listener has to be taken into account because meanings shift in varying situations and historical context" (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 176). Schoen's (1983) view on reflective inquiry emphasizes reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action and the role of storytelling, as key to professional practice. Dewey (1938) also emphasizes the importance of reflective thinking on professional growth and understanding through critical examination of practice.

From Field Texts to Interim Text and Final Research Texts

To begin analysis of the participant stories, I listened carefully to each story as it was recorded. After listening, I spent some time sitting with what I had heard and reflected on the participant's experience. By "moving away from the actual transcript, [I] asked, "what it means" and "what is it's social significance" (Ollerenshaw & Connelly, 2002, p. 342). This intense form of listening and relistening was important to me. Once I had done this, I slowly began to create the interim field texts into what is called a narrative account(s). This approach sought to create a nuanced and multifaceted understanding of participant experience by highlighting both shared ideas and individual perspectives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Once I had composed a draft narrative account, I shared this with the participants during a joined meeting. The narrative account was designed to honor each of their unique experiences while illustrating the fluid and evolving nature of personal narratives. Each participant was given a copy of the narrative account and was asked to make changes where they felt it was needed. As part of this, I also begun to share some of the narrative threads that I had identified by laying the individual experiences metaphorically side by side (Clandinin, 2013). During our meeting I had written the beginning narrative threads on a large sheet of paper and invited each participant to provide some responses. Each thread was developed while keeping in mind the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space of time, place, and context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative threads are developed by identifying recurring ideas, patterns, or tensions that weave through participants' stories across time and context. In narrative inquiry, these threads are not predetermined themes but emerge from the relational and temporal engagement with the data, often shaped by listening, collaborative meaning-making, and sustained reflection. Researchers attend to how experiences are storied over time (temporality), how individuals interact with people and environments (sociality), and where these experiences unfold (place).

A significant moment during the discussion emerged when we explore the thread that focused on their experiences of shared trauma. Although this term might imply a collective traumatic event, the participants clarified that it referred to common elements of their individual experiences that resonated with one another, fostering a sense of shared understanding. It was through reflections that we were able to further engage in developed our understandings.

Through using a process reminiscent of reflective practice, I crafted a cohesive interim narrative that wove together the lived experiences of all four participants, enabling them to better understand their evolving professional identities. Within the narrative account is also my own

experience interwoven as personal meaning and insights (Ollerenshaw & Cresswell, 2002). Revisiting the narrative accounts through this collective process, revealed the interplay between personal practical knowledge and the broader institutional narratives participants inhabit (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Reflection, as a process, is crucial for learning and healing. It allows us to consider multiple perspectives and develop a deeper understanding of experiences. Reflection guides individuals from one experience to the next, uncovering connections and relationships that inform future understanding and action (LaBoskey & Hamilton, 2010).

Throughout the process, I maintained an online journal to document observations and reflections, acknowledging my positionality and striving to respect the participants' voices. Reflection played a key role, allowing me, as well as participants, to critically engage with our experiences and develop a deeper understanding of evolving teacher identities (Schoen, 1983). This iterative reflection aligns with the ideas of ongoing negotiations between participants and researchers in narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). Offering the opportunity of adding new layers of meaning as they reflect on past actions and future implications.

Thinking with the Touchstones of Narrative Inquiry

Each research study is assessed for its scientific rigor. While principals of rigor are developed for qualitative methodologies, these are often contested in narrative inquiry. As a result, Clandinin and Caine (2013), developed key touchstones that mark the quality of a narrative inquiry study. These touchstones provide twelve guiding principles for conducting a narrative inquiry and emphasize the relational, experiential, and ethical dimensions.

Researchers must reflect on their own narrative beginnings, acknowledging how their personal experiences, interests, and identities shape the inquiry. This is critical as it makes visible who the research is and is becoming within the study. These narrative beginnings also are the

start to making visible the justifications of a narrative inquiry study. Justifications should be clear on why the research matters at personal, practical, and social levels. Narrative inquiry is a relational methodology that requires researchers to build and sustain respectful relationships with participants. Researchers must be aware of their presence in the inquiry and how their interactions influence the research process. Each narrative inquiry unfolds over time and even after leaving the field, narrative inquirers carry responsibilities for the experiences that were shared with them by participants.

Narrative inquiry values lived experiences as legitimate and rich sources of knowledge. This idea builds on the work of pragmatist like Dewey (1938) and Addams (1902). It challenges dominant research paradigms that prioritize objective data over subjective human experience. Building on the criteria of narrative developed by Dewey (1938) of continuity and interaction, in narrative inquiry, experience is always situated within the three dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Experiences and lives are not static. Narrative inquiry involves engaging with participants' experiences *in the midst*, as they are lived and told, while also allowing space for retelling and reliving as participants make sense of their evolving experiences. In this way experience is seen as unfolding over time. This is important as researcher pay attention not only to the living and telling of experiences, but also as they represent experiences. There is a need to ensure that writings and representations always leave open the possibility for a new telling and the becoming of participants.

The ethical implications in narrative inquiry go beyond formal ethical approvals of research ethics boards. While, narrative inquirers adhere to all institutional protocols, there is a need to further contemplate relational ethics. Researchers must remain ethically engaged

throughout the process, ensuring participant voices are respected, represented, and negotiated in ways that honor their lived experiences. In this way narrative inquirers are always negotiating the purse of the study, as well as the relationships they hold with participants. It is critical that narrative inquirers practice ongoing reflexivity, continuously questioning their positionality, experiences and the ways in which they shape and interpret the stories told and lived.

Turning Towards Participants

After carefully attending to the methodological implications and unfolding of this narrative inquiry study, I am turning now towards the narrative accounts that show both the individual and collective experiences of participants. What follows then is a turn towards narrative threads and eventually the understanding of the personal, practical, and social significance of this study.

Chapter 4: Narrative Account

In this chapter, I present the interim research text, also called a narrative account (Clandinin, 2013). In this account I retell the experiences of participants, as well as make visible who I am alongside them. Some of the participants I have known prior to the research, which allows me to call forth my relationships alongside them from long ago. The text shows our interwoven voices and experiences as we contemplate what it means to become and be a teacher.

Meeting Participants

I arrived early at the University, nerves buzzing as I prepared to embark on this critical stage of my research. It had been a long journey to reach this point in my doctoral work, and I felt like I was finally moving forward. To ensure everything ran smoothly, I brought my son, a tech-savvy ally, to help set up the recording system and safeguard the stories that would be shared. Initially, I planned to use a familiar meeting room, but when I arrived at the University, I discovered the graduate lounge was a far more inviting space. The quiet of the Sunday campus reassured me that we wouldn't be disturbed. The lounge, with its cozy arrangement of couches and chairs around a low table and its welcoming light streaming through large windows, felt perfect. I thought of Clandinin's (2013) emphasis on shared spaces and Dewey's (1938) perspective on experience as continuous. Clandinin expands this idea to include the relational aspect between people and places; these connections resonated within me as I stood quietly in the doorway recalling memories of being in this space.

This room was more than a setting; it carried layered meaning for me and at least two of the participants. This place was evoking memories of our work at CORE. Through being part of CORE, we had supported children and their experiences, and our shared efforts filled this space with a narrative of its own. As a researcher, I understood my role within these storied landscapes,

aware of how my identity intertwined with the narratives I was studying (Clandinin, 2013). Similarly, each participant brought their own institutional stories of the University and the education program, each one unique, complex, and personal.

As the participants arrived, my initial anxiety gave way to calm excitement. I was honored to create this space for our circle. Duncan, Lyra, Callie, and Avery had all graduated from the University of Victoria with teaching certificates, a milestone achieved amid the unexpected obstacles of COVID-19 and the usual challenges of university life. While the journey was grueling, it shaped their resolve and brought them here as teachers. When Lyra and Avery arrived, I instinctively wanted to hug them, but we stood apart. We had come alongside one another during my years running CORE and although they had both worked with me at CORE, their paths hadn't crossed before now. Seeing them together affirmed the richness their perspectives would bring to this inquiry.

I welcomed everyone with tea and snacks, and as we settled in, we took a moment to catch up. Duncan had moved on from classroom teaching since our last conversation, while Lyra had relocated up island. I was eager to hear how her life had taken shape. Avery was navigating a series of contracts, keeping busy as always. Though I had worked alongside these three participants before, I realized how much of their lives I didn't know. I felt out of touch in this moment.

When Callie arrived and everyone found a seat, the atmosphere shifted, as Callie and I did not have a previous relationship to draw on. Callie brought a sense of new beginnings, that I was excited about. The L-shaped couch comfortably seated three participants, while Avery chose a chair across from the group. I took the remaining chair, with Duncan to my left and Avery to my right, completing the circle. To open our gathering, I acknowledged the traditional territory

on which we were meeting and expressed gratitude for their time and trust. I assured them that their experiences would be honored and respected throughout my research.

I outlined the session's structure, invited questions, and reminded everyone that this was a safe space, emphasizing the importance of confidentiality. They sat quietly, listening to my opening words. There was an air of respect but also nervousness, I considered that they might be wondering how their stories would land with me, but also with the other participants. I took a breath and started to invite participants to share the narrative they had been working on prior to coming to the circle today. I had asked participants to reflect in their writing and thinking about the time when they were becoming a teacher. Once settled, each participant began by sharing their 'becoming' story. After each narrative, we took a silent pause to reflect and allow the story to resonate before the next person began. Each of these pauses felt natural within the space we had created. Nobody left their spot, but there were small movements, someone picking up a water bottle, another shifting slightly in their seat. This unhurried approach ensured the depth and integrity of the process, honoring the importance of personal reflection. I was about to learn that as new teachers, their paths were different, but their struggles reflected one another's.

Coming to Know Duncan

The first participant to share his story was Duncan. He seemed willing to jump in. Duncan has worked in various alternative educational spaces. He holds both a teaching certificate and a master's in education from the University of Victoria. Although not currently a full-time teacher, he continues to contribute meaningfully to teaching as part of an alternative inquiry-based school. Duncan began his story with a laugh, admitting he had spent years avoiding becoming a teacher, only to find himself consistently drawn back into educational spaces.

When I first met Duncan, he struck me as genuinely friendly and approachable. His brightly colored glasses, which seemed endless in variety, added a playful touch to his demeanor and reflected his vibrant personality. At the time, he was working in a youth program at the University of Victoria, where my son was enrolled. That initial encounter was the first of many, as our shared connection to the education department and a mutual passion for alternative learning spaces led to running into each other on campus. Over the years, we crossed paths about a dozen times, often briefly, yet each meeting left an impression on me. Duncan consistently showed a genuine interest in my projects, always curious about what I was working on next.

As Duncan began his story, he admitted that, although he *got* school, he had tried more than once to steer away from a teaching career. Laughing, he recounted his plan to pursue careers outside education, a plan that didn't quite work out as intended.

> *Let me start by saying that I've always loved school. One of the earliest stories I can remember my mother talking about me is how I used to chase the bus when my older sister left for school because I wanted to be there so badly. However, I never wanted to become a teacher. In fact, my mother, who had been an educational assistant in public schools for nearly a decade by the time I was choosing my career path, actively warned me against it. She had seen many young teachers struggle, especially early in their careers.*

Duncan shared that, while searching for a job in the world of Forensic Science, he found work in summer camps and youth centers. At the time he considered these 'pit-stops' on his way to an adult job.

> *I never could have imagined it would lead to involvement with national youth-serving nonprofits, work with inner-city youth, or to my first role running STEM outreach programs at the University of Victoria.*

Ultimately, his work in alternative learning spaces rekindled his passion for education. His role leading a university-based youth science program inspired him to explore innovative teaching models through his Master of Education.

> *I never actually set out to work in the teaching profession, instead I had come to love my work in educational outreach. However, I realized the only way to truly understand was by becoming a teacher myself. Student teacher placements, coursework, and field experiences revealed systemic issues, lack of resources, and administrative hurdles that teachers navigate daily. This provided the practical perspective I needed to understand the necessity of extracurricular programs like those I had run but also left me disillusioned with life in the classroom.*

While his love for teaching grew, his time as a Teacher on Call presented challenges. The transient nature of the role clashed with his deeply held belief in building meaningful relationships with students and supporting them in uncovering their passions.

In many ways, Duncan reminded me of my father, confident, deeply community-oriented, and gifted at connecting with people. He seemed to know just the right person to reach out to in any given situation. His passion for creating alternative learning spaces resonated with me. I too had gone back to school to explore my passion for education. I had found that many of my ideas around education as a homeschool parent were echoed in teaching and learning theories presented during my Masters.

One of Duncan's most remarkable qualities is his ability to connect with people of all ages with genuine interest and respect. Over the years, I've watched him engage with my son, as he grew from childhood into adulthood, always asking thoughtful questions and demonstrating curiosity about what my son was up to. Conversations with Duncan are like a window into his

active and thoughtful mind. His insightful questions create a sense of being heard and encourage meaningful conversations.

Duncan eventually found his place at an alternative [outside of traditional education programs], innovative school that aligned with his vision of education. Surrounded by a team of like-minded educators, he thrived in an environment where his dedication to fostering intrinsic motivation, nurturing creativity, and building strong relationships could flourish. He attributed much of his success to mentorship, finding a supportive network within the school's leadership. Despite the systemic challenges and frustrations, he faced during the Teacher on Call process, Duncan's unwavering belief in education's transformative power kept him moving forward.

> [Joining an alternative school in Victoria] *provided a platform to implement inquiry-based learning in a way that addressed many of the systemic issued I had observed* [in previous classrooms]. *It embraced a pedagogy I had come to understand as the future of education. Most importantly, however, was the team. This opportunity allowed me to work closely with the team and with an experienced educator and administrator with 20 years of experience. Working in this program helped me understand the core of the profession: meeting learners where they are, fostering intrinsic motivation and building self-efficacy to help students succeed beyond the classroom.*
>
> *My experience working with the learning community at the alternative school was pivotal in shaping my identity as an educator and deepening my appreciation for the complexities of the education system. Looking back on these experiences, I see a clear throughline: a dedication to improving education by understanding and addressing its challenges.*

Duncan’s passion to actively make change within the Canadian education system resonated with me. One of the reasons for this doctoral research is to provide space for new teachers to share their lived experience with the hope of allowing administrators and policy makers knowledge that is grounded in the realities of classroom practice.

Coming to Know Lyra

After a quiet pause, the second participant shared her story. Lyra is a teacher from North Vancouver Island. She had made the long drive down to join the story circle. Her reserved demeanor hinting at quiet reflection. I wondered how she was processing the experience. Lyra had worked for me at CORE several years ago, and I had always admired her thoughtful insights into supporting both the children and her colleagues. Since we last connected, Lyra had graduated and worked as a Teacher on Call in Campbell River, BC. After navigating several obstacles, she had recently secured a continuing contract, a significant achievement.

At CORE, Lyra often arrived early, giving us time to chat about her courses. Each year, a few tutors stood out by making my work easier, and Lyra was one of them. If a student needed to be reassigned or a tutor failed to show up, I could always count on Lyra to take on the extra responsibility. Whenever I checked in, she would smile and reassure me that everything was fine, though her expression sometimes hinted at a silent plea for help. Those moments prompted me to find additional resources to address the challenges her students were facing.

For Lyra, the journey to align her authentic self within her professional role had been ongoing. Although she had initially been encouraged to pursue a career in medicine, she chose teaching because it resonated deeply with her.

> *In high school we did things like taking career aptitude tests. I remember getting “neonatal nurse” as my top match. I remember people would make comments about it.*

Well, if you're going to be a nurse, why wouldn't you just become a doctor? Like it's that easy. I had this idea that because I was a good student and excelled in science courses that I should have a career in the medical field. The high status and good pay sounded good too. […] So, at University, I packed my courseload with math, physics, biology, chemistry, and the required English classes. Plus, all the labs that went with them. It was awful. I hated it. I couldn't keep up. […] When second year began, surprise surprise, I still hated it. It got harder. The words got longer. I was still not interested. Cue the mental breakdown. The thought of who I should be or what others expected me to be collided with who I actually was.

I could relate to Lyra's search for her career, her purpose. When I entered University, I did not know where I would land. Psychology was interesting to me, but I remember my father, as a scientist, discouraging me from becoming a psychologist. When Lyra looked at possible careers, one recurring element kept coming to the surface. She wanted to work with children.

The common theme was I knew I wanted to work with children. But, I was hesitant to consider teaching. So many people, including some of my own family members saw teaching as an easy job. A backup plan for students who didn't get into their program of choice. Everyone was downplaying the importance of teaching. It was suggested that I keep that idea to myself. In case I changed my mind.

In one of her psychology classes *the professor said that every child needs at least one adult that they feel truly sees them for who they are and believes in what they can accomplish. Parents are the most common adults, but it can also be another family*

member. Outside of that, teachers are the most likely to make a positive difference on children. I knew that was what I wanted to do.

Lyra's challenges in the University Education program began on the very first day. After a full day of team-building activities, the new preservice teachers were divided into cohorts based on the color of the sticker on their lanyards. Lyra was disappointed to find that none of the peers she had connected with during the day were placed in her group.

All my new friends had red stickers. I had a yellow sticker. We proceeded to have no crossover in classes or in schedules and I barely ever saw them again. I was completely baffled. Why go through all this effort to get to know people I would never see? What a missed chance to get to know the people I would spend entire days with.

Lyra struggles continued with the coursework being *easy, irrelevant and boring. I had honestly never worked so little in all my life. The idea of using the curriculum to build a lesson or unit plan seemed straightforward. Why did we have to "practice" it so many times out of context? We didn't even enter an elementary school in the first month of instruction (missing all the groundwork teachers lay when they meet their students and build routines).*

Her practicum and observation experiences were both inspiring and challenging. During her observation days, she had the good fortune to work with a mentor teacher who demonstrated the power of building strong relationships with students, even in challenging subjects like math. This mentorship left a lasting impact, solidifying Lyra's commitment to fostering trust and respect in her own teaching practice.

My biggest takeaway from our observation was when my mentor teacher told me why he volunteered all the hours before school in media club. Math is hard. Middle school

students know this. Some of them fear it. Some might feel awkward to ask for help. So if he builds a relationship with them first through a fun activity like media club, and then he tries to get them to do hard math, they might be more willing to trust him.

Her second term at university increased her frustration. She described herself as good at math, often helping her peers. While in her required math class Lyra was embarrassed by her professor and confused by the situation, she had been put in.

When we walked into the room, the first thing we did was talk about how many people have bad experiences with math. We should teach in a way that is not threatening so that more people have positive experiences with math. Then we did an exercise where we were given the numbers 0-9 and we had to come up with the biggest number, but we were only allowed to use the digits once. Lyra responded: "nine hundred eighty-seven million, six hundred fifty-four thousand, three hundred and twenty-one." After repeating this over and over, and being shut down by her professor with a curt "no," each time. I finally caught on that I was saying "and" in between hundred and twenty and very slowly while staring her down stated "nine hundred eighty-seven million, six hundred fifty-four thousand, three hundred twenty-one." Finally she says. We don't say "and" anymore. We used to, but now it is solely used when talking about decimals. I was once again flabbergasted. Not five minutes after talking about trying to change people's relationship with math to be more positive did my professor, whose job it was to teach us how to teach small children, provided me with my first bad one. By the end of the hour my whole body was shaking with embarrassment and rage. And every single member of my cohort was scared of our math professor.

Her second mentor teacher, while supportive, exposed her to the complexities of managing classroom behavior. She often felt pressured to send disruptive students to the office, a practice that conflicted with her core belief in maintaining connection and care within the classroom. Despite these challenges, Lyra's determination to meet students where they were at and providing safe and supportive spaces never wavered. She reflected on how her community had often dismissed teaching as an easy job, but her experiences revealed the immense heart, dedication, and resilience the profession demanded.

One incident during Lyra's time at CORE stands out vividly in my memory. She approached me visibly upset about an assignment given by one of her professors. The task required students to share something personal about themselves. Although Lyra completed the assignment, her professor rejected it, claiming it wasn't "personal enough." Lyra felt uncomfortable with the level of vulnerability the professor demanded and sought my advice. I encouraged her to have an honest conversation with the professor about her discomfort.

> *I was already having a tough time liking or respecting this professor when she revealed one of our final assignments was to write about our emotional and spiritual journey and how that would affect our position as a teacher. I knew exactly what had shaped me emotionally and spiritually. I was in high school when I was diagnosed with malignant melanoma. No one knew how to talk to me. My friends stopped talking to me. I guess pretending I didn't exist or that I wasn't their friend was easier for them than coping with having a friend in crisis. If I ever brought it up it was kind of shusshed away. You're okay. Everything is fine. Without anyone to talk to, I started to feel numb. I dropped a class, and then another. I felt like a ghost. I felt like I was drowning and no one could see me.*

Not a single adult in my life knew how to help me cope. No one suggested a counsellor. I tucked my trauma away and tried not to think about it.

Unfortunately, the professor was unmoved by Lyra's honesty and insisted she redo the assignment. Frustrated but determined, Lyra rewrote and submitted her assignment sharing about her health crisis in high school. The experience left both of us disheartened. The situation clashed with our shared belief in creating safe, inclusive spaces for learning, an essential quality for any educator. Lyra shared that, as a teenager she had felt unseen and dismissed, and this experience called forth this trauma. Lyra's dedication to mental health education for teachers that would provide educators with tools to see and support their students was born out of her own experience as a student with a serious health challenge.

In my educational psychology class that I hated so much, one of the activities was to think of a teacher that we really liked or appreciated, since it is often those teachers that inspire us to become teachers ourselves. I did have some great teachers. But I think it was the teachers over the years (including in university) that let me down that inspired me to go into teaching. As I learned more about psychology and myself, I have come to accept and forgive many things that have upset, frustrated, or disappointed me over the years. It reminds me of the saying "know better, do better." It reminds me to care for my students, even when they're being annoying and unlikeable. It reminds me of the power of connection and collaboration with my colleagues. It is easy to forget what it feels like to be a kid or to be the new person on staff.

Lyra's experience in her final practicum highlighted the lack of meaningful preparation within the program and how this can hinder teacher identity formation. She felt disconnected from core aspects of teaching. She entered the profession feeling unprepared and uncertain. This

experience shaped an emerging teacher identity marked by disorientation and a search for deeper purpose beyond surface-level expectations.

> *It felt like, when I was in my teaching program, it was the hoops. You just jump through all those hoops and finally you get through it. Even in my final practicum, I had a mentor who wasn't a continuing teacher yet and they had all their binders. I was told pick what you want, teaching is about being in front of the room. I felt like I didn't learn anything about how to plan or build community. By the time I finished everything I was thrown off into the deep end.*

As a new teacher, Lyra's already challenging experience as a Teacher on Call was made even more difficult by the constant need to navigate the district's unclear and often contradictory rules around contracts and hiring. She found herself caught in a system that lacked transparency, where communication was inconsistent, and expectations shifted without warning. This lack of clarity not only created logistical barriers to securing stable employment but also left her feeling unsupported and undervalued by the very structures meant to guide her professional growth. As a result, Lyra's emerging teacher identity became shaped not by mentorship or collaboration, but by a growing disorientation and an urgent need to find meaning beyond the surface-level expectations of compliance and classroom management.

> *In a short-term position, 1 ½ days per week, the teacher told me that I could just plan and set up the room. I did not know how to set up routines, I did not know how to set up a schedule, I did not know what the kids needed in their supply bins. So, it was wild and I was super overwhelmed, but I figured it out. It was a very challenging year with very challenging kids. Absolute chaos but I survived the year.*

> *Again,* [in another position], *I was told that if I worked in the class every Monday and Tuesday, that when it got to 21 days, I would be awarded the contract. But, if I missed a day because I was sick, I wouldn't get it. During this contract I fell, and my hand was really swollen and sore. I didn't go to the doctor because I was scared it was broken and I'd need surgery, and that I wouldn't be able to go to my contract days of work. This led me to waiting two days before going, being sent for x-rays, and finding out that my knuckle was shattered. I was in such a precarious position that I felt unable to put my own health and wellbeing first, without risking my opportunities in the district.*
>
> *I don't know the rules, they aren't written down anywhere.*

Lyra's frustration with bureaucracy was evident in her tone, and it deeply resonated with me. As the Coordinator of CORE, I had also encountered the challenges of navigating university silos and a lack of meaningful faculty engagement. Despite my efforts and successfully securing over half a million dollars in donations, CORE often felt like an afterthought within the department, even though it was a program I cared deeply about. I remember attending a meeting of administration and faculty about the department's vision moving forward. Nervously, I asked about the vision for CORE, an important outreach program within the department that I had spent years building. The response I received, in front of a room full of colleagues, felt both dismissive and disrespectful. Reflecting on this moment now, I see how my decision to pursue doctoral work mirrors Duncan's choice to get his teaching certificate. Both of us recognized that understanding, and the ability to influence change, often requires being on the inside of the system, learning how it works, and, in many ways, learning how to play the game.

Coming to Know Callie

Callie, the third participant to share her story, presented as open, friendly, and reflective, a combination of qualities that made her instantly approachable. Unlike the other participants, I hadn't met Callie before, and I was eager to hear of her experiences. When she arrived, she chose a seat at the end of the couch. As I watched her settle in with the other participants, my initial impression was one of curiosity. Callie appeared to strike a balance between having everything together and navigating the uncertainty of a young teacher still finding her footing. However, as I listened to her story, I realized her obstacles didn't stem from insecurity but from the systemic obstacles she had encountered since becoming a teacher. As she began her narrative, she introduced her 'golden nugget' philosophy, a concept that had helped her endure the challenges of university life. For Callie, university often felt like an endurance test. To navigate the grueling journey, she embraced the idea of finding one 'golden nugget' in each class, something valuable she could take away, even if the course as a whole, felt overwhelming and irrelevant. This philosophy became both a survival strategy and a testament to her resilience, as she found meaning and growth in even the most difficult experiences

Callie's path into teaching was anything but straightforward. She had envisioned herself as a teacher since middle school, but when she didn't get into UVic's education program on her first try, it devastated her. She began to question not only her dream but also her identity. However, when she finally graduated, the joy she felt was palpable.

> *On June 1st, 2020, I was officially a teacher teaching in the school district that I had grown up in! This was the day I began living the dream I had envisioned since the seed had been planted in grade 6.*

Yet, as she stepped into the profession, she discovered that teaching was far more complex and challenging than she had imagined. At the beginning of her career, she was offered an interview which highlighted the school district's lack of transparency in hiring processed.

> *During the interview, I tried my best to say all the buzzwords I had been taught at university, trying to get all the points to get a high enough score to be hired.*

Her first year in the classroom was a whirlwind of difficult experiences: classroom violence, relentless expectations, and the emotional toll of witnessing her colleagues struggle with their mental health. It was a year that would have been impossible to navigate without the unwavering support of her family. She quickly realized that the career she had worked so hard for was not what she had been sold during her teacher training.

> *The thing about Teacher on Call is that once you make connections you get work. During my first two years, I set up classrooms and packed them up, covered for burnt out teachers and was put in questionable situations. The job I was doing was far from the one I had been sold. I learned very quickly that you are highly replaceable. There were days I was met with little energy or respect. On several occasions it seemed I was an inconvenience. I tried my hardest to avoid ruffling any feathers and took as many callouts as I possibly could in hopes of gaining seniority as quickly as possible.*

As we had heard from Duncan and Lyra, mentorship was key for Callie's success navigating her first years.

> *I am so thankful for colleagues and teaching influencers for helping fill the large gaps the teaching program left me with. I have been able to rely on family and friends to keep me afloat during challenging situations.*

Callie's experience highlights how identity formation in teaching is deeply shaped by emotional and relational experiences. Facing daily violence and overwhelming challenges, Callie developed a strong sense of responsibility and care for their students, fueling a desire to "save" them. Despite significant support, these intense experiences not only tested their resilience but also profoundly impacted their evolving sense of self as a teacher.

> *The truth is teaching is an incredibly hard job! If you let it, it takes you on a wild emotional roller coaster that can cause great harm. Last year was the most challenging year yet. Other educators have told me that they have never seen learners like the ones in my classroom. I experienced violence every day. I built deep, heartfelt relationships with my students that triggered my internal desire to save them. Each day I thought about what they were going home to and what their future held. It was incredibly overwhelming and heartbreaking. Even with major community, school district and school-based support I saw my students struggling. I finished that year exhausted, dysregulated and defeated. I was in disbelief that I had made it to the end of that school year.*

Callie's teacher identity was challenged by her lack of guidance and preparedness many teachers face when navigating complex professional relationships. She shares uncertainty in responding to emotionally charged parent interactions, discomfort in involving administration and receiving advice that conflicts with her personal values.

> *I swim between no responses to urgent emotive questions about their child. I have struggled with self-doubt and have been nervous to hand off passionate parents to admin. I have received advice that does not align with my values and have had to grapple with my own beliefs. I have wondered if being honest and evidence based is not prioritized in the education system.*

Eventually, Callie found an opportunity to move to a smaller school. This shift allowed her to focus on her values and prioritize her mental health. She came to understand that having supportive colleagues and mentors wasn't just helpful, it was essential for both surviving and thriving as a teacher. By the end of the session, I had a deeper understanding of who Callie is: a kind and dedicated educator who, sometimes to her detriment, works tirelessly and passionately advocates for her students and colleagues.

Coming to Know Avery

Finally, Avery shared their story. Avery had worked for me at CORE, and I held great respect for their layered experiences and unwavering dedication to education. While Lyra and Avery hadn't met before this research project, their shared passion for teaching and their unique journeys immediately connected them to the group. Avery's background is as unique as their personality. They were homeschooled alongside their siblings, following a nontraditional path that eventually led to a degree in education at the University of Victoria. Their university experience included a challenging year of online learning due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, which Avery described as isolating yet eye-opening.

Avery is a warm, energetic, and naturally likable person. Slightly shorter than me, with short hair and a preference for clothing often stereotyped as more masculine, Avery embodies a confident authenticity. When they first joined CORE, I found it challenging to consistently use their chosen pronouns, not because I didn't want to, but because I had never worked closely with someone who identified as they/them before. However, I was determined to get it right because I deeply respected Avery and their chosen identity. Their patience and understanding made the adjustment easier, and I grew more comfortable over time.

If I had to choose one word to describe Avery, it would be *authentic*. This quality made them incredibly relatable and effective in connecting with students. Avery had a knack for engaging young people, often joining in playful activities or silly games to ease stress and build rapport. If a group activity was suggested, Avery was the first to dive in with enthusiasm. We often had long conversations about homeschooling, sharing our differing perspectives: mine as a homeschool educator and theirs as a homeschooled student. While our family motivations for choosing homeschooling were different, we found common ground in stories of adventure and the flexibility that shaped our lives. Avery, one of four siblings, spoke with warmth about their close-knit family and the unconventional, sometimes bumpy road their education had taken.

As Avery began their story, they smiled saying that what they had written is probably very different that what they will share. Their teaching story began when they were very young when their sibling wanted to learn piano.

> *Well, they want to start learning now, so I'm going to teach them. I have memories of sitting my 4 years old sibling in front of the piano and teaching them what I knew and being really proud of that and the thrill and excitement of watching someone learn because I was able to support them and teach them. […] I was very interested in being a teacher. My imaginative play often revolved around me pretending to be the schoolteacher and giving my sibling and neighbor kids assignments and sending them off to a fake classroom in our backyard. I think that comes from a fascination of the community aspect of learning. For me there was a curiosity about school.*

Avery titled their written story *practice in being human: A first year teacher story.* This illustrates Avery's commitment to fairness and respect which stands out in everything they do. They approached challenges with thoughtfulness, always returning with carefully considered

ideas and solutions. A hardworking problem solver, they consistently went above and beyond, whether taking on extra responsibilities, running group sessions, or assisting with administrative tasks.

Avery's journey hasn't been without frustrations. During their practicum, they clashed with a supervisor who demanded conformity to a rigid, punitive model of classroom management, an approach that directly opposed Avery's values. They envisioned a classroom filled with freedom of choice, kindness, and creativity, yet felt forced to comply to avoid failing the practicum. It was a disheartening experience that tested their resolve.

During their first week practicum, Avery's mentor teacher was the vice principal, and they were often pulled away, leaving them to *jump in and teach*. As they shared their experience with the practicum supervisor, Avery was visibly emotional. It was clear that these memories still held strong feelings. The most challenging aspect of this practicum was with the University supervisor:

> they *had a really different philosophy for how to relate to students and how to manage classroom than was the kind of person that I am and the kind of values that I have. I was very clear about the values I have as a teacher. My advisor said you are really bad at this management. I was told I needed to be meaner. I cried almost every time I had an observation because I was being told I had to be different in your being as a human and in your attitude toward students. […] I understood that I struggled with classroom management, and I needed strategies but the strategies I was being told to use were counterintuitive to who I am as a person. My values and how I want to treat students. I was told I needed to do this differently or it will reflect badly on your report. I ended up with a good report, mostly because I just fell in line. […] I know that was distinctly not*

the way I wanted to teach but I'm going to suck it up and just get through. It made me cry every night because the way I was being told I had to be was so far out of alignment with who I am.

Avery's story is one of aligning their personal identity with their professional aspirations, a task that has proven to be their greatest challenge so far. Although, after their experience during their first practicum Avery feared starting their final practicum, they knew what their goals were.

I had been so afraid of the nine-week practicum because I barely survived the six week one, and I love this job so much and I want to not be so disheartened by the system and the expectations. And I really wanted to learn. I want to learn how to engage a whole class. I wanted to learn how to develop my own teacher identity and how to match my values as a human with my teaching values.

The hardest part of teacher education was not being taught how to match my values with the actual work. The biggest questions I had weren't about how to plan a lesson or manage a class. They were about how to make decisions that aligned with who I wanted to be as a human, non-punitive, kind autonomous, fun, creative, free, intentional, safe. Doing that alignment work was the hardest part of my first year of teaching.

Their first job was as a mobile prep teacher, traveling from classroom to classroom, often left them feeling disconnected and unable to establish their own learning environment. Avery likened the experience to being a troubadour, carrying their instruments of joy and creativity from place to place. While it was a lonely and exhausting role, it also offered a unique opportunity to explore the expansive possibilities of teaching.

Like being human, I discovered this year that teaching is one long line of unexpected things after unexpected things, and mostly you are expected to know how to handle each one (even when you very much don't).

Avery's dedication to knowing themselves as a teacher and aligning that with their core beliefs and values, and wanting that for their students too, is admirable. I know that when I decided to leave CORE, Avery took on a leadership role and which made the transition easier for the students, families and myself. I had full confidence in their ability to lead CORE with care and creativity.

Story Circle Thoughts

As we sat in silence, absorbing the weight of the moment, I looked around the room. We had just listened to four powerful stories, and though no one spoke, the air felt charged with energy. Pieces of each story connected to experiences I had had within my lived experience as an educator. After reaching over to turn off the recording, I invited each participant to take a moment to reflect on the day's experience in writing. The silence deepened as they pulled out their computers and began typing, fully immersed in their thoughts. Only after they had all finished did conversation begin to flow again.

As they shared their reflections aloud, I realized how valuable these in-the-moment insights were. Gently, I interrupted to ask if I could take notes. Their passion and frustration were palpable, each one building on the previous person's emotional connection to their experiences. The struggle within the system was undeniable. Looking back, it struck me that Duncan's perspective, having chosen to work outside the public school system, gave him a different vantage point. He described education as a business where teachers, especially new teachers, were exploited, and he questioned what it would take to change the system. Lyra expressed deep

frustration that 24 out of her 26 students had been sent to the office, a reality that clashed with her philosophy of supporting students more holistically. Callie and Avery echoed similar concerns, agreeing that the system is largely reactive and that parents hold significant power in shaping its outcomes.

Duncan, Lyra, Callie and Avery's reflections weave a powerful narrative of the struggles, systemic issues, and glimmers of hope experienced by early-career educators. For Duncan, participating in the story circle was a bittersweet reminder of why he chose to leave the public education system.

> *Reflecting on this story circle about educators' first five years in the education system, I find myself feeling deeply disheartened and frustrated. These dedicated and brilliant educators, who have committed themselves to their students and their career, are faced with a profession stuck in an outdated mindset. It often feels like we are bound by a shared trauma bond, collectively navigating a challenging and unyielding system.*

He described an entrenched mindset among decision-makers, the *edu-crats*, who seem to believe that since they endured the system, others should too, regardless of how much the landscape of education has evolved. This perspective, Duncan argued, perpetuates a cycle of frustration, disillusionment, and negativity, overshadowing the passion and dedication of educators.

Lyra shared her own frustrations, though her reflection carried a note of cautious hope. For her, the act of sharing her story and hearing others' experiences felt like a small light in a dark tunnel. *It made me feel less alone in my challenges,* she said.

> *Sharing and listening I felt seen. Whether it was the look of other members when I shared something or hearing a story that was similar to mine. All new teachers are experiencing*

these same things. We are being thrown out off into the deep end without any support or adequate training or resources. Once your practicum is over the support is gone.

Listening to the common struggles of her peers reminded her that the system's failures are not personal, they are systemic. From being thrown into the deep end without adequate training or support after practicum, to facing inconsistent expectations for reporting and the constant churn of school leadership, Lyra painted a vivid picture of a reactive, outdated system that fails both teachers and students.

Within the context of these challenges, Callie's perspective brought the themes of preparation, mentorship, and perseverance into focus. She reflected on the recurring reality that *teachers are not trained for their real role,* emphasizing how the system's refusal to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of teaching where educators act as parents, counselors, nurses, and more has left teacher education stuck at surface-level definitions of the profession.

All four of us have walked away knowing that we were not prepared and have experienced exhaustion stress and frustration. What has helped all of us is good mentors. We have had enough people in our corner to push us forward. People who want to help and share similar values.

Callie credits the support of like-minded individuals who share similar values with enabling her peers and her to persevere. I credit Callie with being determined to seek out colleagues who believe in her and validate her feelings and experience. *These mentors may just be the reason we have survived.*

For Callie, the story circle also offered a sense of possibility. While the system's flaws feel overwhelming, she drew strength from a professor's advice:

You can't change the entire system, but you must find small things to change. Overall, I believe that groups like this provide us with potential opportunities to make small changes. Although it feels like a short 3 hours, it will have a trickle effect into all of our practices.

For Avery, the early years felt like survival. Every day brought a new challenge: managing a diverse group of students with varying needs, juggling temporary contracts that left them future uncertain, and learning on the job because teacher education hadn't prepared them for the complexities they faced.

It feels like a bundle of contradictions more than anything else. New teachers bring this joy and passion and innovation to the profession but are stuck in the hardest jobs, fighting for scraps and trying to learn the systems that are often mind-bogglingly opaque. We struggle with loneliness and discouragement and we're constantly learning on the job because no one ever taught us half the things we needed to know before we set foot in our first classroom. At the same time, we are resilient. No one told me how to navigate the politics of the staff room, the emotional labor of teaching, or the sheer exhaustion of it all.

There were moments that kept Avery going, like those flashes of educational magic when a struggling student finally grasped a concept or when a class discussion sparked unexpected insights. These moments were a reminder of why they were there, even as burnout loomed and the system's flaws seemed insurmountable.

Watching the room as each of us told our stories, there was a sense of yes, me too, I've been there, I know that feeling. There was solidarity. Hearing these stories has highlighted the need for more of this – the storytelling of early years teachers. We need

each other's stories to stave off the loneliness and to come alongside us while we build our identities as teachers.

After reading their reflections, I could feel the connections that had been made. Together, Duncan, Lyra, Callie, and Avery's experiences point to a shared belief in the need for systemic reform and a collective desire to move beyond survival toward a teaching profession where educators can thrive. Despite their challenges, they found connection and solidarity in their shared experiences, sparking hope for a future where their passion and perseverance lead to meaningful change. Each narrative was a testament to the resilience and creativity of navigating a flawed system, striving not just to survive but to find joy and purpose in their work. Each of the participant's story, became a thread in a larger tapestry, a call for understanding, storytelling, and systemic change in the teaching profession. The emotion of the circle had changed. Now, no longer strangers, they had come along side one another and found support.

Revisiting the Narratives

I always feel nervous about sharing my writing and joining the participants as we revisited our experiences. They had shared with me with their personal and professional stories of becoming teachers, and I was presenting a re-storying of their experiences during our second time together.

Duncan exuded his usual confidence, though I had the sense he had carved out time from a busy day to be there. His life always included juggling many things. Lyra, in town for the weekend, seemed calm and content to be present. Callie, unfortunately, couldn't attend due to illness, so I planned to email her and gather her feedback that way. Avery arrived with a warm smile, their engaging presence always made it feel like they were fully in the moment. I handed them each a copy as we settled into reading my retelling of their experiences, I was nervous

about how it would land. Usually good at reading aloud, I found myself trying to find a rhythm. Here is what I read that day:

Once Duncan, Lyra, Callie, and Avery graduated from the University of Victoria with their teaching certificates, excitement and relief mingled with the weariness of the long road they had traveled. The journey to becoming teachers had not been an easy one. The unexpected challenges brought by COVID-19 had only compounded the typical university obstacles, but they had made it through. Finally, they were teachers. Yet, as they looked back, they realized how much of that journey had been shaped by the struggle to find relevance in their studies and to navigate the hoops they had been forced to jump through. For Callie, the university experience often felt like an endurance test. To get through, she held onto the idea of finding a *golden nugget* in each class, just one thing she could take away. Lyra, on the other hand, had entered university with a clear goal: teaching had always seemed like her calling, despite the advice of others who pushed her towards more prestigious careers like medicine. But her early university years had been grueling. Only her introduction to psychology had sparked joy. Lyra had sought opportunities to learn about mental health and diversity in education, but the response was always the same: *There's no time for that*. It left her feeling disillusioned. Avery, too, had been frustrated. Their practicum supervisor was insistent that they fit into a rigid mold, with strict, punitive measures for classroom management - an approach that clashed completely with Avery's philosophy. They wanted to create a classroom filled with autonomy, kindness, and creativity, but felt forced to conform. Failing the practicum was a real possibility if they didn't comply. Then there was Duncan. I've always loved school, he offered when telling his story, though he had tried more than once to veer off the path toward becoming an educator. In the end, it was working in alternative learning spaces that rekindled his passion. His experience running a

youth science program at the University of Victoria led him to explore innovative teaching models through a Master of Education. His love for teaching deepened, but the work he did as a Teacher on Call brought its own set of challenges. It conflicted with his core belief in the importance of building meaningful relationships with students and helping them uncover their own passions.

As new teachers, their paths were different but their struggles continued to reflect one another's. Duncan found himself drawn to working at an innovative school that supported his vision of education. Here, he found a team of like-minded educators, and his dedication to building relationships with students, nurturing intrinsic motivation, and fostering creativity could flourish. He believed that mentorship was the key to his success and found a strong support system within the school's leadership. Despite the hurdles of the Teacher on Call process and the systemic challenges that often left him feeling frustrated, Duncan's belief in the power of education to transform lives kept him going. For Lyra, the struggle to align her authentic self with her professional role had been constant. Despite being pushed towards a career in medicine, she had chosen teaching because it was what truly connected with her soul. Her experiences in the classroom had been both inspiring and challenging. In her first practicum, she had been blessed with a mentor teacher who showed her the power of building strong relationships with students, particularly in difficult subjects like math. This mentorship left a lasting impression, and Lyra found herself committed to the kind of teaching that fostered trust and respect. Lyra's second mentor teacher was supportive, but she felt the pressure to manage difficult behaviors in ways that didn't align with her values. Advice to send students to the office when they became unmanageable felt like a betrayal of her belief in classroom connection and care. Still, Lyra had an innate drive to meet students where they were and provide safe spaces. She remembered how

her community had seen teaching as an “easy” job, but her experience told a different story. It was a profession of heart, dedication, and resilience.

Callie’s journey into teaching had been rocky from the start. When she didn’t get into the education program at the University of Victoria right away, it devastated her. She questioned her identity and her dream of becoming a teacher. But when she finally did graduate, it was a moment of pure joy. *This is the day I begin living the dream I envisioned since grade six*, she thought. However, the reality of teaching was much more complex than she had imagined. Callie felt privileged to have made it through, aware that others hadn’t been so lucky. Her first year of teaching was filled with challenges - classroom violence, overwhelming expectations, and the emotional toll of witnessing colleagues struggle with their own mental health. It was necessary that her family support her through this challenging year. She quickly realized that the job she had trained for was far from what she had been sold. Moving to a smaller school gave her the chance to focus on her values and prioritize her mental health. She came to understand that supportive colleagues and mentorship were essential for surviving and thriving as a teacher.

Avery’s journey was about finding a way to align who they were as a person with who they wanted to be as a teacher. It was a task that had proven to be the most difficult part of their career so far. Being a mobile prep teacher often left them feeling disconnected, unable to create their own learning environment. They likened their experience to that of a troubadour, traveling from classroom to classroom with their instruments of joy and creativity. It was a lonely and exhausting role, but it also gave them a chance to explore the vast universe of teaching. Their goal was to create classrooms that felt free, intentional, and safe - spaces that nurtured both students and the teacher. With the support of colleagues, they had begun to navigate the

unexpected challenges of the profession. Avery found comfort in the idea that practice didn't just make good teachers - it made good humans.

Through their shared stories, Duncan, Lyra, Callie, and Avery came to recognize the systemic challenges that had shaped their experiences. The Teacher on Call process was riddled with catch-22s, leaving Duncan unqualified for certain opportunities despite his education and passion. Lyra, too, had missed opportunities due to a lack of communication and procedural knowledge. She had even worked with a shattered knuckle because she feared missing a single day would cost her a contract. Callie saw how leadership positions within schools often led to burnout, and she understood the toll the system took on mental health. Avery described teaching as an endless line of unexpected events, each requiring immediate action despite new teachers' lack of preparation to meet these challenges. Still, despite all these challenges, each of them remained determined to make a difference. Duncan found spaces where he could apply his knowledge and passion for innovation. Callie looked toward leadership roles, hoping to enact positive change. Lyra held tight to her belief in the power of relationship building and being there for her students, and Avery continued to refine their understanding of what it meant to be both a teacher and a human being. The four of them knew that the system was flawed, but they found they were ill-prepared to meet the unknown obstacles that exist within the education system. Each of them has held on to their *golden nugget* that they each have the power to create change - one classroom, one student, and one connection at a time.

After I finished reading, there was a pause, a natural silence filled the room. Slowly, I relaxed my shoulders and smiled at them, encouraging their input. Their feedback was positive, and each person shared that they felt heard and respected. They all recognized that the system was flawed and that they had been underprepared for many of the realities they faced.

Chapter 5: Resonant Threads

Narrative threads are the conceptual linkages, storylines, that emerge across multiple stories and weave through a narrative, connecting different elements to create a cohesive whole (Clandinin, 2013). Resonant threads support researchers to trace how certain aspects of identity, experience or meaning develop over time within context and particular places. As I engaged with the participants' stories and re-storied their life experiences, two narrative threads resonated most strongly for me. Firstly, each participant emphasized the complexity of an authentic teacher identity, being able to be a teacher, and the lack of agency they felt within that space. Secondly, as we came alongside each other in our story circles, we began to identify and name experiences of shared trauma. This was profound for me and shaped the second resonant thread of relational agency as a response to trauma.

Thread 1: The Complexity of Authenticity and Agency within Teacher Identity

To support the discussion of emergent teacher identity, I returned to think with Clandinin’s (1999) framework of teacher identity development. By focusing on the dynamic process of narrative reshaping, Clandinin's framework provides a lens for understanding how teachers navigate the complexities of their professional worlds and the process of becoming a teacher. In their paper “Sustaining Teachers’ Stories to Live By”, Schaefer and Clandinin (2018) call on teacher education to be “concerned with the identity making process of pre-service teachers” (p. 55). Institutional expectations place immense pressure on new teachers who are still developing their teacher identities, which can lead to high attrition rates.

Participants' experiences made visible how they navigated their early teaching journeys through expressions of agency while they encountered systemic challenges or bumping places, or tensions. In the academic literature on teacher identity, tensions are recognized as a significant

catalysts for identity development. Karalis Noel (2021) applies narrative inquiry and a symbolic interactionist perspective to examine the experiences of a teacher who left the profession within four years of completing a traditional teacher education program. The study reveals that tensions between pre-service expectations and the realities of classroom teaching can act as powerful catalysts for identity development, prompting teachers to reflect on and reassess their professional roles. These findings emphasize the need for teacher preparation programs to address identity tensions in order to more effectively support early-career educators. Similarly, research by van der Wal et al. (2019) examines how early-career teachers experience professional identity tensions. The study identifies that these tensions can lead to various emotional and behavioral responses, such as reflection, seeking support, or taking directive actions. These responses indicate that tensions can serve as opportunities for professional growth and identity development.

Agency in Beginnings

Long before stepping into a classroom, every teacher has already begun shaping their professional identity through intentional reflection, personal choices, and meaning-making. As Schaefer and Clandinin (2011) note, "[w]e live on school landscapes for much of our young lives and are shaped by our teachers and experiences on school landscapes" (p. 275). New teachers carry with them forward-looking stories that extend well beyond the boundaries of their teacher education programs. By paying attention to these stories to live by, we may better understand and be able to support their stories to stay by, the narratives that sustain their commitment to teaching over time. Teaching was not simply a profession the participants fell into, it was a path navigated with deliberation, even when shaped by ambivalence or resistance. As Beijaard (2018) notes, "developing a teacher identity is imbued with and fueled by many aspects that are

primarily personal, such as one's own biography, aspirations, learning history, and beliefs about education" (p. 3). Each participant approached teaching from a distinct personal standpoint, acting within, but often bumping up against societal expectations. To have agency means having the capacity to resist, reinterpret, or reframe dominant discourses or institutional expectations. The participants did not passively absorb messages about teaching; they actively interpreted, questioned, and responded to them, making choices that reflected their emerging sense of self and purpose. Each one of them displayed a sense of agency that was shaped by their early school experiences.

For Duncan, the decision to become a teacher came through conscious resistance. Warned by family members who had witnessed the challenges young teachers faced, Duncan initially sought distance from the profession. *Do not become a teacher*, he was told, but ultimately, his choice to enter teaching reflected a reclaiming of agency and an evaluation of how the system worked. Duncan realized that becoming a teacher would allow him to better understand the education system and give him a voice that would be taken more seriously within it. *The longer I worked in this field, the more I realized that the only way to truly understand was to become a teacher myself.*

Lyra's story highlights how agency is not simply about making choices freely, but about making choices within and against social perspectives and expectations that attempt to shape one's path. Her experience bumped up against societal narratives that diminished teaching. Surrounded by voices that dismissed the profession, *everyone around me was downplaying this role*, she pursued a science path instead. Yet when an aptitude test suggested neonatal nursing, and someone advised, *if you are going to be a nurse, you might as well be a doctor*, Lyra recognized how others tried to steer her choices. The tensions Lyra felt, when her authentic self

bumped up against advice from others, led her to choose a career focused on working with children. Choosing teaching, in the end, became an act of alignment with her inner self, reclamation of her passion for education despite conflicting external pressures.

Callie's journey, on the other hand, reveals how inspiration and affirmation can spark intentional direction. A sixth-grade teacher's encouragement ignited a sense of purpose that Callie carried forward with determination: *She has given me my purpose in life*. Rather than being passively influenced, Callie responded with commitment, actively shaping her trajectory around that early connection. For Avery, teaching was never merely a role but an extension of identity from an early age. Growing up as a homeschooler, they gravitated toward teaching roles in their everyday play. Their first experience of choosing to teach piano to a younger sibling wasn't just a game, it was a meaningful experience of agency, of being *in a supportive role watching someone learn*, and it planted the seeds for a future career grounded in empowerment and curiosity.

Despite different beginnings, all participants engaged in a process of navigating, challenging, and choosing, constructing their identities in relation to both personal convictions and broader cultural narratives. These formative experiences were not passive inheritances but active sites of meaning-making, shaping how each participant claimed and redefined their place within the teaching profession. As Lortie (1975) noted, early encounters with teaching often frame a future educator's sense of identity. Yet participants' stories reveal how preconceived notions were not simply adopted, they were interrogated, reworked, and, in many cases, transformed. In choosing to step into teaching, each person carried with them not only their lived experiences but also the agency to actively shape their own path.

Systemic Challenges: Bumping Places

My experiences have let me to believe that our current academic system is broken. The systemic challenges that impact the education system in British Columbia include large class sizes, lack of funding, limited access to resources and inadequate support for students and teachers. (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2020). Additionally, the recruitment and retention of teachers have become pressing concerns, particularly in rural and remote areas, where shortages are exacerbated by limited professional development opportunities and high living costs (Hyslop, 2024). While making visible these documented realities, the participants experiences provide clear indication that the system needs to change. I think about how Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) draw our attention to the early years of practice for teachers and how they are shaped by the context:

> In order to anticipate the reshaping of professional identity that will come, we must continue to consider the situation of teachers in the early years of practice, where the influence of their surrounding context – the nature of the educational institution, teacher colleagues, school administrators, their own students and the wider school community – is strongly felt. (p. 186)

The experiences of Duncan, Lyra, Callie, and Avery collectively highlight the disconnect between teacher education programs and the realities of new teachers. Duncan pursued his teaching certificate with clear intent, believing that credibility among educators required working within the system. My own experience echoed this reality. As a homeschool educator I often bumped up against the view of not being a *real* teacher. Duncan quickly encountered systemic barriers, including the challenges of the Teacher on Call system, which limited his ability to secure a stable position and make an impact. He observed that *teachers are doing seven people's*

jobs and found himself in *a paradoxical situation, where the requirement to secure a position that would allow [him] to make a significant impact meant making less impact in the interim.*

While roles like Teachers on Call can disrupt a sense of continuity and belonging for early career teachers, they also offer opportunities to navigate diverse school contexts and develop adaptive expertise. Lyra's experience reflects this tension. Despite feeling unprepared for many aspects of teaching, particularly in supporting students with mental health challenges, an area she had intentionally sought out in her teacher education program, she met each new challenge with a repeated refrain: *I guess I'll figure it out*. Far from expressing resignation, this phrase reveals what Biesta and Tedder (2007) describe as ecological agency, the capacity to act within and in response to one's environment, even when conditions are uncertain or constraining.

Lyra recalled being told during her program, *we're just going to talk about curriculum, you'll make a big unit plan and then we will send you off,* reflecting a disconnection between preparation and practice. When asked to set up her classroom in September, she realized she had never experienced the start of a school year and lacked foundational knowledge about routines, schedules, or even the basic supplies her students would need. She described feeling *thrown off into the deep end.* And yet, with each moment of uncertainty, she returned to her agentic response: *I guess I'll figure it out*.

The narratives shared by participants illustrate what Clandinin et al. (2010) refer to as stories to live by, expressions of identity that are shaped in and through professional landscapes. Lyra's refrain signals not only a response to situational demands, but an emerging professional identity grounded in persistence, self-trust, and adaptability. Her story reinforces Beauchamp and Thomas's (2009) argument that identity formation is deeply contextual, shaped by the affordances and constraints of the environments in which teachers begin their careers. In Lyra's

case, agency and identity were not static traits, but evolving capacities forged through navigating, and reshaping, the unpredictable spaces of early teaching.

Callie, recognizing the gaps in her education, adopted a survival mindset, looking for a *golden nugget* in each class to carry her through. During her practicum, she hoped that if she was *nice* and did her job quietly, she would make it through. Now, as a new teacher, she is grateful for colleagues and online teaching influencers who have helped fill in the gaps her education program left behind. Avery's experience echoes Callie's frustration, as both struggled with feedback that challenged their sense of self. When Avery's practicum supervisor advised them to *be different in your being as human*, the comment struck at the core of their identity. They reflected that it was *difficult to hear criticism which backed up against [their] authentic self*. Although Avery *ended up with a good report*, they acknowledged this was *mostly because [they] fell in line*. This decision was another example of ecological agency as Avery strategically negotiated their role within a system that often demands conformity. As Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) note, identity development is shaped by how individuals respond to the expectations placed upon them, especially in high-stakes environments like practicum. Teacher education programs that underprepare candidates for the complex realities of teaching can further complicate this process. Yet many, like Avery, respond with critical reflection and subtle forms of resistance, finding ways to preserve their integrity while navigating the institutional pressures of becoming a teacher.

Together, these experiences reveal rich examples of agency, even in the face of systemic shortcomings in teacher preparation and the ways new educators must navigate, adapt, and often compensate for the gaps in their education. Duncan frames his entry into the profession as a means to have influence, indicating a purposeful and reflective approach. Lyra took initiative in

her program by seeking out learning opportunities in mental health support. Despite feeling unprepared, she continually adopted a *figure it out* mindset, demonstrating resilience and self-reliance. Callie too adopted a *survival mindset*, using an active strategy to extract value where possible. As a new teacher, she reached out to colleagues and online influencers, taking control of her learning beyond formal education. Avery remained aware of and resistant to pressures to conform that experiences that threatened their authentic self. They processed feedback critically, balancing external evaluations with internal identity, indicating reflective professional agency.

Facing Systemic Challenges

Systemic challenges within education shape identity development, but teachers are not passive recipients of these forces. New educators enter the profession with personal beliefs, values, and aspirations, or what Beijaard (2019) calls "beliefs, self-perceptions, goals, and perceived possibilities for action within their professional roles" (p. 2). When values bump up against institutional realities, such as large class sizes, inadequate mental health supports, or precarious employment, teachers actively negotiate their identities, making deliberate choices about how to engage with or resist these tensions.

These tensions, while challenging, often catalyze identity growth. As teachers seek mentorship, build networks, and engage in reflection, they assert agency in shaping who they are and how they teach. Schaefer and Clandinin (2019) call for teacher preparation models that recognize teachers as people who teach, emphasizing the importance of identity development grounded in agency and authenticity. Reflection, as Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) note, is key to this process, allowing teachers to understand and enact their evolving roles. As Lyra's story shows, identity is not given, it is figured out, shaped through action, reflection, and ongoing negotiation. Kelchtermans (2014) argues that teachers develop a personal interpretative

framework throughout their careers, a set of cognitions and mental representations that shape how they perceive their profession, assign meaning to their work, and guide their actions. This concept aligns with Dewey's idea of interaction, emphasizing learning from experience over time.

The connection between respect and identity development is rooted in the importance of interpersonal relationships and social recognition in shaping a teacher's sense of self. Respect, both given and received, affirms an individual's value and role within a community. Lyra described it as *still treating the newer teachers with less respect.* This affirmation is essential for cultivating a positive and coherent identity, particularly in educational contexts where relationships with peers, mentors, and students play a critical role. When new teachers feel respected and acknowledged, it reinforces their emerging professional identity and contributes to their sense of self-efficacy.

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) highlight that identity realization within the teaching context can lead to "a sense of agency, of empowerment to move ideas forward, to reach goals or even to transform the context" (p. 183). They further emphasize that this agency is closely tied to how teachers interact with and are influenced by the educational environments they inhabit (p. 184). In this way, respect becomes not just a social nicety, but a foundational component of identity formation and professional empowerment. Callie and Avery both highlight the challenges new teachers face as they transition into the profession. Callie describes the difficulty of being a young teacher with fresh ideas, only to encounter resistance from more experienced colleagues whose experience is that they are fatigued by change: *There are people who have been in the field longer who don't want to hear what I have to say.* This disconnect, often rooted in differences in experience, fatigue in responding to change, pedagogical approaches, and

familiarity with institutional norms, can create barriers to communication and collaboration. Avery adds to this struggle, reflecting on the abrupt shift in responsibility that many new teachers experience. *I was not expecting to be responsible for a whole class literally three weeks after I had graduated*. Together, their experiences underscore the steep learning curve and the challenges of navigating professional dynamics as early-career educators.

Kelchtermans (2014) argues that “a new teacher’s self-image is more important to them as practitioners than is the case in occupations where the person can easily be separated from the craft” (p. 258). Unlike many other professions, teaching deeply intertwines the personal and the professional. New teachers frequently navigate the tension between their personal beliefs, values, and emotions, and the professional identities they are expected to adopt. When these elements conflict, whether with institutional expectations, school culture, or pedagogical norms, teachers may experience identity dissonance. Integrating these aspects is crucial for developing an authentic teaching identity that sustains both practice and personal well-being. Schaefer and Clandinin (2019) emphasize that teachers’ struggles to define both personal and professional identities reflect a deep connection between their roles as educators and their broader sense of self. Authenticity in teaching is not simply a personal ideal, it is essential for forming meaningful relationships with students, delivering effective pedagogy, and supporting the ongoing development of one’s professional identity.

For many new teachers, the entry into the profession is marked by tensions between internal values and external demands. Lyra, for example, was passionate about mental health education, an interest rooted in her own experiences of not feeling seen as a youth. Despite seeking training during her teacher education program, she found the topic largely absent. In her early years in the classroom, she witnessed escalating student behaviours and felt unsupported by

administrators who claimed students *seem fine on paper*. As a result, she often sent students to the office, a practice that conflicted with her values and highlighted the dissonance between her ideals and institutional responses.

Callie described the challenge of receiving advice that did not align with their values and the need to critically reflect on their own beliefs in response, an essential step in identity formation. Similarly, Avery grappled with authenticity during their practicum, striving to *be human in the classroom* but feeling pressure to conform when advised to *be different in [their] being as a human*. To meet expectations, they felt compelled to *suck it up and fall into place*, which led to a deep sense of disconnection: *feeling so out of alignment with who I am*. These stories reflect a broader pattern among new teachers: the struggle to reconcile personal identity with professional expectations. Navigating this tension is not just a challenge, it is a defining aspect of early career development and a key site for the exercise of teacher agency.

Each participant described an education system where *jumping through hoops* was the norm, creating frustration and disillusionment. Duncan felt *disenchanted by the entire system*, viewing teaching as working under constant government oversight, *a government agent, under the watchful eye of whatever government is in power*. Lyra echoed this sentiment, explaining that *you jump through all those hoops and then you get through it*. Her experience with the Teacher on Call process was chaotic and frustrating. Between misinformation, contract structures, and a disconnect between hiring systems, Lyra found herself working with a severely broken hand just to meet the required 21 days for a continued contract. One of the biggest issues she identified was the lack of transparency: *I didn't know the rules, they aren't written down anywhere.* In this confusing environment, new teachers are expected to rely on the advice of school staff, which is often outdated or incorrect. Her conclusion: *The schools don't really care about me.*

Callie also highlighted flaws in the hiring process, specifically the district's point system used to determine whether a teacher qualifies for a contract. *I had no idea how the point system worked*, she explained, realizing that specific keywords and phrases were required to earn enough points to be hired. *I tried to say all the buzzwords I was taught at university just so I could get the job*. Beyond hiring, new teachers are encouraged to attend professional development workshops to expand their learning. However, Callie found this approach ineffective in addressing the actual needs of teachers: *Going to a mindfulness workshop on your professional development day is not going to fix the system*. Research supports this concern, as Olive et al. (2024) argue that interventions focused solely on teacher wellness, such as mindfulness and self-care, are insufficient; instead, addressing systemic issues like workload, time off, and healthcare benefits is necessary to mitigate secondary trauma (p. 373).

Avery similarly felt *disheartened by the system*, particularly by the lack of support for new teachers. *How do I just jump in, and how do I do that with no support?* Avery also pointed out that in a climate where art and music programs are being reduced, new teachers in these fields are often *not seen as a real teacher by colleagues.* Callie highlighted another critical resource gap: the limited support available for students who need extra help. She described the frustration of wanting to assist students but being unable to find appropriate resources. *There are situations in education where you really want to help people, and there are no more resources*, she explained, likening the system to *a bucket that is exploding*. This shortage puts immense pressure on teachers, who are expected to support every student despite lacking the necessary tools.

One of Callie's most challenging early experiences came during a Teacher on Call position, shortly after graduation and following the return to in-person learning after the COVID-

19 pandemic. She was tasked with writing report cards for an entire class of students she barely knew. Reflecting on the situation, she admitted, *Looking back, I had no idea that I could have said no or that it wasn't a situation I should have been put in*. This experience highlights the systemic challenges new teachers often face, being placed in high-stakes roles without the necessary preparation, support, or agency to advocate for themselves.

Thinking with Agency

Professional identity comprises the notion of agency, or the active pursuit of professional development and learning in accordance with a teacher's goals (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Yet, many participants expressed that they initially lacked this sense of agency, often feeling overwhelmed by systemic barriers and unsure of how to advocate for themselves. Despite this, their stories also reveal how access to, even small degrees of agency helped them navigate the profession more effectively. Duncan, for example, ultimately chose to leave the profession after facing persistent instability and a lack of meaningful opportunities to make an impact. Callie found greater alignment with her values and teaching style by seeking out a smaller, more supportive school environment. Lyra, despite feeling unprepared and unsupported in the early years, gradually carved out space for her values by advocating for student mental health and finding ways to *figure it out* through persistence and self-direction. Avery, once no longer in the role of a 'mobile' teacher, was able to claim a consistent space and develop an authentic presence in the classroom, something they had previously struggled to do while under pressure to conform during their practicum.

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) highlight the contextual nature of identity development, particularly for new teachers. They argue that "situating the shaping of a teacher's identity within the context of practice implies the necessity to be aware of the effects this context might have on

the shifts and changes in a teacher's identity" (p. 184). The school environment, learner population, and relationships with colleagues and administrators all play a critical role in influencing how teachers come to see themselves. As Beauchamp and Thomas explain, "The school environment, the nature of the learner population, the impact of colleagues and of school administrators can all be influential in shaping a student or new teacher identity, as of course are their own experiences as learners in schools" (p. 184). Together, these perspectives illustrate how identity and agency are co-constructed within shared spaces, dynamic places where past experiences, present interactions, and imagined futures converge. Such spaces do not merely contain identity and agency; they are integral to their ongoing formation.

Thread 2: Relational Agency as a Response to Trauma

The thread of *shared trauma* was pulled organically through collective reflection among participants following the story circle and the opportunity to revisit and re-story their narratives. In their initial written accounts, submitted prior to the circle, each participant described personal, often painful, experiences that shaped their journeys into teaching. Yet, it was within the *s*hared space of the story circle that a deeper understanding began to take root: their trauma was not merely individual, but relational and systemic. Trauma is defined as "any disturbing experience that results in significant fear, helplessness, dissociation, confusion, or any other disruptive feelings intense enough to have a long-lasting negative effect on a person's attitudes, behavior, and other aspects of functioning" (American Psychological Association, 2021, para. 1). While student trauma is widely acknowledged as a challenge within education, less is known about the prevalence of trauma among educators and how it varies across identities and experiences (Olive et al., 2024). Teachers not only bring their own past experiences into their profession, but they also navigate the trauma-impacted lives of students, families, communities and the education

system itself. This can lead to secondary trauma, further compounding the pressures faced by new teachers.

As I think about the reflections each participant was asked to write after the story sharing in our circle, I could see that there was a much deeper understanding of the participants' unique experiences. Reflections are an important aspect of learning and healing; they allow us to consider different perspectives and understandings. Reflecting is a process of making meaning that guides a person from one experience to the next, fostering a deeper understanding of its connections and relationships to other experiences and ideas (LaBoskey & Hamilton, 2010).

A Journey Through Reflection

Duncan, Lyra, and Callie's reflections weave a powerful narrative of the struggles, systemic issues, and glimmers of hope experienced by early-career educators. For Duncan, participating in the story circle was a bittersweet reminder of why he chose to leave the public education system. He listened as brilliant, dedicated educators recounted experiences of merely surviving in a profession that often felt stagnant and unyielding. *It seems like we are bound by a shared trauma bond,* Duncan observed, *collectively navigating a system that prioritizes self-preservation over the well-being of its individuals.* He described an entrenched mindset among decision-makers, the *edu-crats,* who seem to believe that since they endured the system, others should too, regardless of how much the landscape of education has evolved. This perspective, Duncan argued, perpetuates a cycle of frustration, disillusionment, and negativity, overshadowing the passion and dedication of educators.

Lyra shared her own frustrations, though her reflection carried a note of cautious hope. For her, the act of sharing her story and hearing others' experiences felt like a small light in a dark tunnel. *It made me feel less alone in my challenges.* Listening to the common struggles of

her peers reminded her that the system's failures are not personal, they are systemic. From being thrown into the deep end without adequate training or support after practicum, to facing inconsistent expectations for reporting and the constant churn of school leadership, Lyra painted a vivid picture of a reactive, outdated system that fails both teachers and students.

Within the context of these challenges, Callie's perspective brought the themes of preparation, mentorship, and perseverance into focus. She reflected on the recurring reality that *teachers are not trained for their real role,* emphasizing how the system's refusal to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of teaching where educators act as parents, counselors, nurses, and more has left teacher education stuck at surface-level definitions of the profession. *All four of us have walked away knowing that we were not prepared,* Callie noted, highlighting the exhaustion and frustration this has caused. Yet, she also identified mentorship as a lifeline. *Good mentors may just be the reason we have survived,* crediting the support of like-minded individuals who share similar values with enabling her and her peers to persevere. For Callie, the story circle also offered a sense of possibility. While the system's flaws feel overwhelming, she drew strength from a professor's advice: *You can't change the entire system, but you must find small things to change.* Callie expressed hope that gatherings like the story circle could inspire small yet meaningful changes, creating a ripple effect in their collective practices.

For Avery, the early years felt like survival. Every day brought a new challenge: managing a diverse group of students with varying needs, juggling temporary contracts that left their future uncertain. They too had to learn on the job because teacher education hadn't prepared them for the complexities they faced. *No one told me how to navigate the politics of the staff room, the emotional labor of teaching, or the sheer exhaustion of it all.* There were moments that kept Avery going, like those flashes of *educational magic* when a struggling student finally

grasped a concept or when a class discussion sparked unexpected insights. These moments were a reminder of why they were there, even as burnout loomed, and the system's flaws seemed insurmountable. Listening to Duncan, Lyra, and Callie share their struggles and hopes, Avery felt an overwhelming sense of solidarity. *It's not just me. We're all in this together.* The recognition that the challenges were systemic, not personal, lifted a weight off her shoulders.

Together, Duncan, Lyra, Callie, and Avery's reflections point to a shared need for systemic reform and a collective desire to move beyond survival toward a teaching profession where educators can thrive. Despite their challenges, they found connection and solidarity in their shared experiences, sparking hope for a future where their passion and perseverance lead to meaningful change. Each narrative was a testament to the resilience and creativity of teachers navigating a flawed system, striving not just to survive but to find joy and purpose in their work. Each of the participant's story, became a thread in a larger tapestry, a call for solidarity, storytelling, and systemic change in the teaching profession. This story intertwines the threads of authenticity, agency, and trauma, revealing how each aspect shapes the lived experiences of early-career educators navigating a flawed educational system and finding reasons to stay by.

Considering Relational Agency

Relational agency serves as a key tool for addressing the trauma experienced by participants, offering a way to foster resilience through mutual support. It refers to the capacity to both seek and offer assistance in interactions with others, grounded in shared understanding and collaborative action. As Edwards (2006) defines it, relational agency is "a capacity to align one's thoughts and actions with those of others in order to interpret problems of practice and to respond to those interpretations" (p. 169). These relationships are not rooted in dependency but in fluid, reciprocal engagement, allowing individuals to navigate challenges together while

developing the skills to support and be supported. Importantly, this dynamic process of mutual responsiveness contributes to identity formation. As Edwards and Mackenzie (2005) note, "relational agency both as the supported and the supporter is a crucial factor in the development of purposive identities" (p. 301). In this way, relational agency becomes not just a response to trauma but a foundation for purposeful, evolving professional identities that allow people to be sustained in face of trauma.

As participants listened to one another and engaged in collaborative meaning-making, they began to recognize that their experiences were not isolated, but relational, shaped through and with others within a broader educational landscape. Relational agency, within a narrative conception of knowledge, exists both in a teacher's internal personal practical knowledge and in their interactions with the broader professional knowledge landscape (Schaefer et al., 2010). The trauma they described was not rooted in singular events or discrete settings, but surfaced through recurring encounters with a system that often marginalizes, constrains, or fails to acknowledge the emotional realities of beginning teachers. These bumping places were not merely individual moments of tension, but relational disruptions that revealed how systemic conditions are lived and negotiated together.

Trauma is both personal and collective, deeply rooted in systemic conditions. Duncan's metaphor of a *trauma bond* captures how shared hardship can become a unifying, yet painful, experience. In the co-constructed narrative space, which participants came to describe as *shared* (a term first introduced by Duncan), relational agency began to take shape. As participants named, reinterpreted, and reframed their experiences through dialogue, they enacted a form of agency that was not individual but relational, emerging through responsiveness to one another's stories and grounded in mutual recognition. By collectively claiming language to describe their

experiences, the group engaged in a process of narrative agency that was inherently collaborative. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest, naming is central to how individuals compose and recompose their stories to live by, stories shaped not only by place, but through relationship. This dialogic process transformed the shared space into a site of healing and transformation, where identity and agency were co-authored and situated in context. The act of listening, responding, and reimagining together became a form of collective resistance to dominant narratives, offering a relational stance toward agency that foregrounds interdependence rather than autonomy.

This dynamic reinforces Beauchamp and Thomas's (2009) assertion that "situating the shaping of a teacher's identity within the context of practice implies the necessity to be aware of the effects this context might have on the shifts and changes in a teacher's identity" (p. 184). Here, context includes not only institutional norms and professional relationships, but the relational work of co-constructing meaning. In the story circle, participants were not merely reacting to their environments, they were actively reshaping them through shared reflection, relational responsiveness, and collaborative sense-making.

Duncan described feeling disheartened and frustrated with a system stuck in an outdated mindset, referring to decision-makers as *edu-crats* who believed that because they suffered and endured the same system, others should too. He observed that many new teachers were simply trying to survive in a profession steeped in negativity. This echoed his mother's warning of early teachers struggling. For Duncan, the broken system presented many bumping places and tensions, leading him to leave the public education sector. Reflecting on this choice, he felt grateful for stepping away, as it allowed him to find a community of educators who truly align with [his] values and work in a space free from the embedded trauma.

Avery echoed Duncan's frustrations, describing the early years of teaching as *hard and overwhelming*. They expressed that *the system is rigged against us* making it difficult to hold onto the joy and passion that initially drew them to teaching. Both Lyra and Callie shared experiences of challenges that deeply affected their physical and mental well-being. Lyra described the education system as *old and reactive*, highlighting a lack of consistency across schools, where *different schools and principals have different expectations*. Callie found that while new teachers often enter the profession with fresh ideas, these are frequently met with resistance from more experienced colleagues. The absence of mentorship and support, combined with *constant change and an unwillingness to collaborate*, made Lyra's early years in teaching especially difficult. Despite these struggles, she emphasized the importance of authenticity, stating, *Showing up as yourself in the classroom* was essential to her teaching practice.

Callie relied heavily on her family for support during her second year of teaching, a time marked by extreme stress that led to physical symptoms, including hair loss. She relied on her colleagues who would *run across the school to my classroom to rescue me.* Looking back, she admitted, *The truth is that teaching is an incredibly hard job. If you let it, it takes you on a wild emotional roller coaster that can cause great harm.* Avery reinforced this sentiment: *No one taught us half the things we need to know before we set foot in our first classroom*. Callie's experience underscored the systemic challenges faced by new teachers: *You are highly replaceable. There were days I was met with little energy or respect. On several occasions, it seemed I was an inconvenience*. Across their shared experiences, the participants recounted feelings of exhaustion, stress, loneliness, discouragement, and frustration. The emotional toll of daily encounters with violence within the classroom left Callie drained, concluding, *I finished that year exhausted, dysregulated, and defeated*.

Lyra and Callie speak to the emotional and practical harm caused by under-preparation, inconsistent leadership, and unrealistic expectations, and ongoing conditions that create chronic stress and erode well-being. Avery's reflections highlight trauma at the micro level: emotional exhaustion, precarity, and the isolation of trying to manage it all without sufficient guidance or support. *We need each other's stories to stave off the loneliness and to come alongside us while we build our teacher identities*. The act of sharing these stories is itself healing, transforming trauma through connection, validation, and solidarity.

The narrative illustrates that authenticity emerges not in isolation, but through relational processes that allow participants to name and share their truths in community. Agency, in this context, is not solely about the individual power to act, but a collective capacity, cultivated through mutual recognition, shared language, and collaborative reflection. Recognizing how early career teachers past experiences shape their identities highlights the uniqueness of each teacher's journey in developing relational agency (Schaefer, et.al., 2021). Trauma, meanwhile, reveals the emotional and systemic burdens of working within a reactive, under-resourced educational system. Yet it is through shared storytelling and relational engagement that participants begin to reframe these challenges, supporting one another in small yet meaningful acts of resistance and reimagining.

Together, these aspects point to relational agency as an essential element, where authenticity, action, and healing are made possible through connection; "A capacity to contribute to one setting connects with a wider sense of self-efficacy and confidence" (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005, p. 301). The story circle becomes more than a reflective practice; it becomes a space of solidarity and transformation, offering a vision of teaching not as isolated survival, but as a relational profession rooted in shared purpose and collective joy.

So What?

Over the course of the study, I was privileged to listen and relisten to the experiences of participants. With time I recognized the resonances across their experiences and began to name these as the complexity of authenticity and agency within teacher identity and relational agency as a response to trauma. In the following chapter I will explore questions of so what? and who cares?

Chapter 6: Considering the Personal, Practical and Social Implications

Narrative inquiry offers a methodological approach that makes visible the complexity and nuance of experience, resisting the reduction of participants' lives into fragmented categories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It promotes reflection and growth as individuals make meaning of their experiences, expanding and shifting *stories to live by*, embracing *forward-looking stories* and, potentially, *stories to stay by*. As this inquiry draws to a close, the narratives shared by participants continue to resonate, and help me think about the complex and layered processes of becoming a teacher. These stories are accounts of professional transitions, but more importantly they are narrative expressions of identity shaped through place, relationship, agency, and trauma. Participants navigated experiences marked by dissonance, constrained agency, and connection, often within emotionally charged, unpredictable, and institutionally bounded spaces. Through the relational act of storytelling, participants engaged in meaning-making processes that reshaped both their personal understandings and their perceptions of the teaching profession.

The experiences shared by participants, as well as my experiences, highlight systemic challenges within the education system: high-stress environments, misinformation, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and a pervasive lack of respect, resources, and support. One particularly pressing and ongoing issue is the chronic underfunding of public education. These compounding pressures contribute not only to burnout but also to the broader devaluation of the teaching profession, making it difficult for new teachers to sustain a sense of identity and agency. Yet, within these challenging conditions, the participants' stories also offer glimpses of forward-looking stories, of finding agency and of being and becoming a teacher. I could see that when participants were able to assert even partial agency, through their environments, relationships, or

personal convictions, they begin to realign their work with their values and reimagine what it means to belong in the profession.

Relational agency offers a valuable lens for understanding how teachers can grow and sustain their professional identities despite ongoing challenges. By emphasizing collaboration, responsiveness, and shared expertise, relational agency has the potential to disrupt teacher attrition by offering a meaningful pathway for professional support and development. While Edwards' (2006) work has been foundational in articulating relational agency, few scholars have explored its connection with ecological agency. There is a need for research that examines these frameworks, both their similarities and differences to deepen our understanding of how agency operates within complex educational systems. This intersection also invites connections to pragmatism philosophies, particularly in how we centre experiences of teachers navigating these frameworks. It raises important questions such as: How do educators experience relational and ecological agency? How can such experiences be fostered in safe, supportive spaces as teachers transition into systems that are marked by significant challenges? These questions are especially relevant in higher education, where preparation for educators often does not account for the contexts of public institutions. What strategies are necessary to remain wakeful to the necessity of reflections and the shared vulnerabilities? My work contributes to this emerging conversation by making visible the possibilities for reimagining teacher identity development through these interconnected lenses. Moving forward, new research should address these gaps to support relational agency that makes experiences across time, place, and social contexts central to the ongoing lives of teachers.

Thinking with Notions of Authenticity

The power of authenticity appears in the reflections each participant offers. Duncan speaks honestly about his decision to leave the system, naming the collective *trauma bond* that connects educators and calling out the toxic endurance culture upheld by decision-makers. His candor reflects a refusal to perform resilience for the sake of appearances. Lyra finds authenticity through vulnerability, naming her struggles and validating them by recognizing their systemic roots. Sharing and hearing others' stories becomes an act of affirming her reality. *Sharing made me feel less alone and hopeful.* Callie reflects with sincerity on her lack of preparedness and the emotional toll it takes, grounding her insights in the truth of what teaching really demands. Her hope, sparked by a professor's advice, to find *one small thing*, is rooted in a desire to stay true to her values. Avery describes the day-to-day emotional labor of teaching, *early years teaching is hard and overwhelming*, acknowledging both the disillusionment and the *educational magic* that keeps them going. Their recognition that their struggles are shared offers an authentic glimpse into the complexity of teaching life. Each voice contributes to a collective narrative where authenticity is not just about being honest, it's about being seen and seeing others clearly within a system that often obscures who one is and is becoming.

Thinking with Notions of Agency

Agency surfaces in moments of resistance, reflection, and small acts of reclaiming power. The story circle itself became a space where agency was nurtured and participants weren't just telling stories; they reclaimed narratives, asserting meaning, and envisioning change. These reflections show the tension between the desire to be authentic and the systemic conditions that can undermine agency. But within that tension, I could also see moments of resistance, empowerment, and deep care, all of which are core to authenticity and agency in teaching. It can

be argued that robust forms of agency are essential for individuals, such as practitioners working across organizational boundaries, to establish moments of stability as they navigate multiple settings without the security of institutional shelters (Edwards, 2006).

Duncan's decision to leave is itself an act of agency a refusal to stay complicit in a system that no longer aligns with his values. Lyra engages in collective meaning-making, using storytelling as a way to assert that her experiences matter and are part of something larger than herself. Callie identifies mentorship and community as sources of empowerment, and her reflection on the professor's advice, she *find small things to change*, and reframes change-making as something possible and ongoing. Avery, despite immense challenges, finds moments of joy and professional fulfillment that re-anchor their purpose, showing agency in choosing to stay, reflect, and keep showing up.

The Power of Shared Space

As I think about authenticity and agency, I am called back to my experiences while undertaking this doctoral degree and I started to remember. Sitting in our spare room at home, I nervously waited to be connected to my first narrative inquiry research group meeting. Vera had invited me, and while I felt an obligation to join, I also carried a quiet frustration, why hadn't anyone extended such an invitation until now? Here I was. The first face I saw was Vera's, as warm and welcoming as when we first met. Her presence immediately put me at ease. Just weeks ago, we had spent a weekend at a writing retreat, and it was nice to reconnect. As more participants joined the virtual room, my nerves crept back in. Then I saw D. Jean Clandinin's name appear on the screen, and for a moment, I had to fight the urge to slide under the table. Who was I to be among such esteemed scholars? Imposter syndrome clung tightly. I had spent

countless hours reading their work, drawn in by their insights, and now I was here, in this space. Clutching my tea, I let its warmth seep into my hands.

As the discussion unfolded, participants shared their work, offering glimpses of their writing. I listened intently, at first feeling like an outsider looking in. Then something shifted. Their words resonated. Their stories, powerful and deeply personal, echoed thoughts and questions I had carried alone. In that moment, I realized, I wasn't just observing. I was part of this space, part of a community of researchers and academics who thought about the very things that mattered to me in narrative ways. That people's life, shared in story was something to be honoured; that experiences held knowledge and contributed to a collective understanding. A connection had been missing in my journey, and here, at last, I had found it. It was from this space, that I began to understand the power of shared space.

Shared spaces, whether physical (such as classrooms or schools), relational (like communities of practice), or narrative (including story circles and collaborative inquiry) are where identities are performed, negotiated, and recognized. These spaces offer opportunities to encounter others' stories, which can affirm, challenge, or expand one's own sense of self. Identity is never formed in isolation; it emerges within social and relational contexts where it is continually co-constructed. As Caine et al. (2022) remind us, "[p]lace is in us, as we are in places; we are shaped by, and shaping, the places within which we live" (p. 112). Quoting Cisneros, they add, "[a] particular place shapes identity and in that intense shaping of a person, shows how identity and place are forever entwined" (p. 112).

These shared spaces also shape the possibilities for agency. Depending on how power, norms, and relationships are structured, they can either enable or constrain an individuals' capacity to act. A supportive community or professional learning environment can encourage

voice, experimentation, and risk-taking. In contrast, a rigid or hierarchical space may silence others or limit their sense of what is possible. When shared spaces foster trust, belonging, and open dialogue, they create the conditions in which agency can flourish, and new possibilities can be co-created. In generative shared spaces, individuals bring with them evolving identities and the potential for agency. As they engage in these environments, their identities and sense of agency grow together through relational, experiential, and reflective processes. At the same time, their actions and presence contribute to shape and reshape the space itself. This creates a mutually reinforcing dynamic: shared spaces influence identity and agency, just as identity and agency, in turn, transform the space.

Narrative inquiry offers a powerful lens for exploring transitions in teachers' lives, as it attends to how individuals make sense of change through story. Whether moving from pre-service to in-service roles, shifting school contexts, or navigating personal-professional boundaries, transitions are often marked by tensions, uncertainty, and growth. Through narrative, teachers reflect on past experiences, interpret present challenges, and imagine future possibilities, allowing researchers to understand identity as fluid and evolving. In this way, narrative inquiry allows us to see the complexity of transitional moments and highlights how storytelling supports meaning-making during periods of transformation.

Returning to Identity and Agency

Caine et al. (2022) emphasize that "we can understand experiences narratively only when we place them within places, both home places, community places, and imagined places" (p. 116). Identity and agency are not abstract constructs, but are situated and enacted within specific contexts, shaped by place, people, and the relationships that unfold over time. As they write, "place is in us, as we are in places; we are shaped by, and shaping, the places within which we

live" (p. 112). This reciprocal relationship underscores the importance of context in understanding teacher identity and agency. In this chapter, I return to these lived and told stories to reaffirm the central argument of this study: that by attending closely to the *stories teachers live by*, we can better understand the challenges faced by beginning teachers and work toward creating conditions that sustain their *stories to stay by*. The threads drawn forward from this inquiry highlight broader implications for teacher education, professional identity development, and the cultivation of shared spaces where educators are supported in knowing and being known.

(Re)Considering What Called Me to this Work

My research puzzle started from my work as the coordinator of CORE where I would listen to preservice teachers talk about their classes, their practicums and their experiences within schools. I heard their struggles, questions and wonderings about how best to support students in situations that were less than ideal. I remember being surprised by their competence, creativity but also by the obstacles they encountered that were real for them. I started to consider inquiring into the gap between teacher education and teacher practice which led me to wonder about beginning teachers' stories. We know that teachers are leaving the profession, and we know that it is a large portion of new teachers who choose to leave. I wanted to know why and if there was a way to provide support to change their stories to leave by to stories to stay by.

Through this research, I have gained deeper knowledge about identity making and the critical importance of authenticity and agency in the role of a teacher. Like each of the participants, becoming an educator felt authentic to me. Duncan, for instance, tried to move away from teaching, only to find himself returning to an educator's role in alternative spaces. Lyra drew on her deep love of working with children to push back against others' perceptions that teaching was a lesser profession. Callie held tightly to her chosen identity as a teacher, making

deliberate choices to turn her aspirations into reality. Avery, even from a young age, recognized the value of teaching through her watching others learn. Across all their experiences, authenticity was not just about curriculum or pedagogy, but about personal alignment, finding one's values and living them through teaching. As Avery reflected, it was about *finding your own values and leaning into those,* and asking, *Who I am as a person and how does that match my teaching*? These reflections resonated with me, as I have also grappled with questions of authenticity throughout my career as an educator. While I have long understood the systemic challenges that run through our education system, like Duncan, I continue to hold onto a vision of *what education could be*. Through this research, I have gained a deeper understanding of the realities facing new teachers, and this knowledge informs and enriches my own practice as a teacher educator.

Looking at the Realities of Teaching

Listening carefully to the participant's experiences offers practical supports that could be put in place, as well as it raises questions for future work. Firstly, to include preservice teachers in the classrooms at the beginning of the school year before the students arrive would build relationships, school community and agency. Including this as part of teacher education would not only allow new teachers to *jump into teaching* with knowledge of classroom organization and management and make the connections to pedagogy, it would also support other teachers within the school system. A program aimed at supporting transitions would allow preservice teachers to come to their university programs with questions and ideas based on the experiences they have encountered.

Secondly, it is critical to build mentorship programs. Relationships, colleagues and mentors were identified by each participant as a lifeline. *My mentor teacher supported and*

uplifted me. It was extremely affirming and continues to motivate me today. This sentiment from Callie illustrates how important it is for new teachers to be seen. When Lyra was denied a mentor teacher in a school where every other teacher had one, she was left to *figure it out* as she *did not get appropriate support*. A sense of isolation is heard through her words. Interestingly, each participant identified relationships to be their reason to stay by. The key relationships were with students. Being able to show up in the classroom and find those moments of connecting with students reminded them of their reason for becoming a teacher in the first place.

Thirdly, as teacher educators and as an education system more broadly, we must prioritize opportunities for new teachers to be seen, heard, and supported. Strong, transparent leadership within schools can help buffer teachers from external pressures, such as shifts in Ministry of Education policies, by clearly communicating what changes are most important and how to navigate them. Transparency through consistent, effective communication fosters environments where teachers can feel trusted and supported, rather than isolated or overwhelmed. When teachers have agency to make informed decisions from a position where they are seen as holding knowledge, they may be more likely to remain in the profession. This must include making the hiring and contract processes more transparent and consistent within school districts, helping new teachers better navigate their first five years to make career decisions that align with their personal and professional goals and values.

Additionally, as one participant suggested, practical supports at the preservice level, such as training in communicating with families and understanding internal school policies, would empower new teachers to engage more confidently and effectively in their school communities. Beyond technical knowledge, teachers face ongoing emotional needs, particularly when supporting students in crisis. The continual need to meet students where they are, and to respond

to complex social-emotional challenges, creates constant pressure for teachers to respond. Prioritizing space for teachers to step back, reflect, and center their work around student well-being is crucial.

One important way to offer this support is by creating places to share experiences in both teacher preparation and early career professional development. Story circles for example provide relational spaces where new teachers can share experiences, witness others' stories, and collaboratively make meaning of their challenges and successes. In these generative spaces, teachers build community, affirm their evolving identities, and strengthen their capacity for agency. Creating intentional spaces to inquire into experiences is not simply about reflection, it is about sustaining teachers through connection, recognition, and collective wisdom

Coming to Relational Agency

Relational agency is crucial in the social aspect of identity making because it emphasizes the co-construction of identity through interactions with others (Edwards, 2006). Rather than viewing identity as something that is individually crafted, relational agency highlights how people negotiate, affirm, and reshape their sense of self in and through relationships. Callie felt unprepared and emotionally overwhelmed. Her ability to process and make meaning of these experiences is strengthened through relationships, with peers, mentors, or professors whose advice to *find one small thing* gave her a foothold for change. That advice doesn’t just offer a strategy, it represents a relational moment in which someone else's perspective reorients her narrative. Duncan’s advice to other new teachers, *to find your community,* offers a space where individuals can narrate, hear, and co-construct understandings of their experiences. This collaborative reflection helps teachers like Duncan affirm that their challenges are not personal shortcomings but reflections of broader systemic issues. Lyra’s vulnerability in sharing her

struggles, and finding resonance in others' stories, transforms her private experience into a shared one. In hearing and being heard, she gains validation and begins to reframe her challenges as systemic rather than personal failings. Avery highlights the power of how shared spaces can support new teachers: *Maybe the thing that hearing these stories has highlighted the most is the need for more of this: the storytelling of early years teachers.* Through this collective meaning-making, participants and I gained a sense of professional identity rooted in connection and solidarity, not isolation. Our agency emerges through the relational space of the story circle, which becomes an empowering act.

Both concepts: relational and ecological agency, challenge the notion of agency as individual autonomy. Relational agency emphasizes co-action and mutual responsiveness in professional relationships, while ecological agency situates this within a broader understanding of contextual, temporal, and systemic influences. Together, they offer powerful tools for understanding how teachers exercise agency within relationships and across complex systems, suggesting that professional growth and identity development are embedded in both collaborative practice and contextual negotiation.

Limitations

While this narrative inquiry offers important insights into the identity formation and experiences of early career teachers, some limitations must be acknowledged. First, the small and context-specific sample limits generalizability. Narrative inquiry prioritizes depth over breadth, focusing on rich, detailed accounts rather than broad statistical trends. While the participants' stories illuminate important realities, they represent particular experiences within a specific context rather than a comprehensive picture of all new teachers' realities. Second, participant self-selection may have influenced the findings. Those who chose to participate were likely

motivated by a desire to share their stories and to reflect on their experiences. Third, the influence of the researcher-participant relationship is an inherent part of narrative inquiry. My presence as a researcher and my own positionality as a teacher educator inevitably shaped the co-construction of stories. Fourth, the timing of the research acknowledges that participants *in the midst* of their professional landscapes. Identities are dynamic and evolving; a different moment in time may have offered different stories or emphases. In this sense, the research offers a snapshot rather than a longitudinal view of identity development. Despite these limitations, the research contributes valuable insight into how new teachers experience identity-making and relational agency and how creating spaces for story-sharing can offer support during the early years of teaching.

As I reflect on this research process, I am drawn to the fact that circle work, viewed through a feminist lens, aligns closely with feminist pragmatist ideas that emphasize the centrality of experience, the importance of social context, and the value of relational and collaborative processes. Rooted in dialogic engagement, circle work fosters reflective meaning-making and supports the co-construction of knowledge through inclusive and respectful conversation. It promotes a shared and distributed sense of power, where each voice holds significance, and understanding emerges collectively rather than hierarchically. This approach resonates deeply with Narrative Inquiry as a methodology, as both center lived experience, relationality, and the generative possibilities of storytelling and dialogue in creating new insights and understandings. As Jane Addams (1902) wrote, “action is indeed the sole medium of expression for ethics” (p. 273), reminding us that ethical, collaborative inquiry is grounded in lived, engaged practice.

Some Final Thoughts

Narrative inquiry is more than a methodology, it is a way of understanding how people compose their lives alongside temporal, relational and practical experiences (Caine et al., 2022). In this context, identity is not fixed but constructed and reconstructed through experience. It is formed in relation with place, people and practices and understood through the stories we tell about ourselves and the stories we live. For the participants, their stories to stay by are woven subtly through the threads of their experiences. Duncan, for instance, shared that finding a school aligned with his passion for the future of education means he *will never leave the profession*. Through storytelling, the value of experience is carried forward, opening possibilities for meaningful shifts, whether large or small. As Hostetler (2010) reminds us, "the answers to research questions do not end things but offer new circumstances for exploring the persistent question of what is good for people" (p. 21). This research highlights the transformative power of stories and their potential to inspire change, even in seemingly small ways. Callie, for example, joined the project because she recognized the potential for *a golden nugget* in sharing her experiences: *Even this opportunity, if I can share what I've experienced so that someone out there, even just one person, can hear it and tweak something small, maybe it will cause a chain reaction*. Similarly, Lyra reflected that by showing up and telling her story, she hoped to *shed some light on the challenges of teaching and of the current educational model*. Their words echo the reasons that drew me to this research: the belief that by listening to and honoring teachers' experiences, we can create meaningful shifts that support and strengthen our teaching communities.

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Appendix A

Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board
Michael Williams Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada
T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research | ethics@uvic.ca

Certificate of Approval - Annual Renewal

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	**Todd Milford** (Supervisor)	**ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER:** Expedited review - delegated	**20-0210**
PRINCIPAL APPLICANT:	**Karen Efford** **PhD student**	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE:	04-Oct-2023
UVIC DEPARTMENT:	**Curriculum and Instruction EDCI**	APPROVED ON:	16-Oct-2024
		APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE:	03-Oct-2025

PROJECT TITLE: **Becoming a teacher: An understanding through Narrative**

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS: **None**

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING: **None**

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:
tcps2_core_certificate.pdf - 01-Sep-2023
data collection prompt ethics 09132023 v3.pdf - 27-Sep-2023
Appendix J_Consent Form Group 1_v3.pdf - 04-Oct-2023

Conditions of approval

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

Amendments
To make changes to the approved research procedure in your study, please submit "Amendments" or "Annual renewal with amendments" form. You must receive research ethics approval before proceeding with your amended protocol.

Renewals
Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

Project Closures
When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria's policies for research involving human participants.

Dr. Sandra Gibbons
Chair, Human Research Ethics Board

Dr. Cindy Holder
Vice-chair, Human Research Ethics Board

Certificate Issued On: 16-Oct-2024

Appendix B

Participant Consent

Becoming a teacher: An understanding through Narrative.

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Becoming a teacher, an understanding through narrative.* is being conducted by Karen E. Efford (Principal Researcher) and Dr. Todd Milford (Principle Investigator) and Catherine McGreger (Advisor).

Karen E. Efford is a PhD Student in the Department of Education at the University of Victoria, and you may contact her if you have further questions at her email address: kefford@uvic.ca or phone 250-532-5483.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to gain insight into the experience of new teachers and how they form their professional teacher identity.

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because the voice and story of new teachers is often missing from academic literature. Teachers have been leaving the teaching profession for a variety of reasons and it is important to gain a deeper understanding of their experience with the hopes of leading to increased or enhanced support through institutional policy and teacher education programs. *This research aims to investigate how new teachers' experiences, shared through story, can provide opportunities to better understand how teachers navigate the first five years of teaching and whether BC University Teacher Education programs can be modified to provide more specific programming that addresses gaps in teacher professional development.*

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a graduate of the University of Victoria teacher education program and are currently teaching in a BC public school for not more than 5 years.

What is involved

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include three meetings. Firstly, each group will gather online in an initial 1-hour orientation session where all

participants will have the chance to ask questions and receive details of the research project. Before meeting in a story circle, each participant will be asked to share their "Becoming a Teacher" story online, through the researcher's UVic Microsoft account which provides protection and privacy of data. Each group will then be asked to meet at UVic for a 3-hour story circle where they will be asked to share their "Becoming" story orally. The stories shared in the circle will be the same stories shared through the researcher's UVic Microsoft account. This story circle will be considered a safe space and participants will be encouraged not to share the stories with anyone outside of this research project. Finally, all participants will be asked to gather at UVic for a final meeting. During this meeting the principal researcher will present themes identified as threads from the shared stories for comment and feedback from the participants.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time needed to attend the meetings and story circle.

Participants will be advised if they have or may have come into contact with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19. Contact information for participants will be stored in a separate file from research data in the event that follow up is needed.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. However, we realize that sharing personal stories can put a person in a vulnerable position. The potential risk of participating is that you may know other participants, either from your education at the University of Victoria or from the teaching community.

In the event you wish to seek support during or after participation, please connect with the following resource: Call 811

Counselling Victoria - Counsellors, Psychologists, Therapists in Victoria | Counselling BC

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include the opportunity to contribute your lived experiences and a voice within the generation of findings toward understanding the experience of new teachers within British Columbia, Canada.

Compensation

In appreciation of your participation, you will be given a $20 gift card after you complete your story circle. Parking costs at the University will be covered by the principal researcher.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used. Compensation will be honored if withdrawal occurs during or after data collection.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

- Only the research team will know your identity. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. The story circles and meetings will be recorded for the purpose of data collection only. The audio recording will be transcribed in a manner that de-identifies your information. Pseudonyms will be used for analysis and dissemination.
- The audio recording and transcribed information will be locked in a filing cabinet it the PI's home office.
- All information disseminated will have identifiers removed.
- Your anonymous stories will not be used in future research projects.
- Information that might identify the participant or people that the participant mentions will be removed or altered.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be presented at scholarly conferences and published in a peer review journal. All information disseminated will be de-identified. Please let the PI (Karen Efford) know if you wish to be made aware of these dissemination activities. The dissertation will also be publicly posted on the UVic Library's website "D-space."

Disposal of Data

Data from this study will be disposed of in the following manner: audio recordings will deleted/erased after one year and de-identified transcripts will be shredded/erased/destroyed after five years.

Contacts and Resources

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include:

- Karen E. Efford, MA. PhD Candidate, Department of Curriculum & Instruction: kefford@uvic.ca, 250532-5483
- Dr. Todd Milford, Advisor, Department of Curriculum & Instruction tmilford@uvic.ca
- Dr. Catherine McGreger, Advisor, Department of Education Psychology cmcgreg@uvic.ca

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

______________________________	______________________________	________________
Name of Participant	*Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.