Designing Forward: Exploring K–12 Teachers' Transition into Instructional Design Roles

by

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

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This thesis was developed with the assistance of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, specifically ChatGPT (OpenAI), to support language refinement and improve clarity of expression. As English is not the author's first language, AI tool was used to assist with grammar, phrasing, and overall readability.

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Definition of Terms

Instructional Design (ID)

A systematic and reflective process of analyzing learning needs and goals and developing instructional materials, learning experiences, and assessments to support effective knowledge and skill acquisition across educational or workplace settings.

K–12 Teachers

Educators who teach learners in kindergarten through Grade 12 within formal school systems.

Career Transition

A professional shift from one occupational role or field to another, involving changes in responsibilities, identity, competencies, and work context.

Subject Matter Expert (SME)

An individual with specialized knowledge or expertise in a specific content domain who collaborates with instructional designers to ensure accuracy and depth of learning materials.

Learning Management System (LMS)

A digital platform used to deliver, manage, track, and assess learning and training activities.

Competency Development

The process of acquiring and strengthening knowledge, skills, and professional capabilities required for effective performance in a role.

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This thesis is a reflection of my perseverance, growth, and the countless hours of work I have poured into this journey. It has taken me nearly three years to complete, and along the way, I have doubted myself more times than I can count. Every page of this work stands as a testament not only to my effort, but to my decision to continue despite those doubts.

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Abstract

This research explores the lived experiences of Canadian K–12 teachers who have transitioned into instructional design (ID) roles, examining how and why educators pursue this professional shift. The central research question asks: What factors drive K–12 teachers to transition into instructional design roles, and how do intrinsic and extrinsic factors impact their motivation, challenges, and competency development? The study addresses a significant gap in the literature on teacher career mobility by focusing on the emotional, professional, and practical dimensions of this transition.

Adopting a phenomenological approach within an interpretivist paradigm, the study is grounded in Self-Determination Theory, Schlossberg's Transition Theory, and Expectancy-Value Theory. Eight participants—all former K–12 teachers now working as instructional designers in Canadian educational or corporate contexts—were interviewed using semi-structured protocols. Braun and Clarke's six-phase model of thematic analysis guided the interpretation of data.

Four central themes emerged: Reframing Prior Teaching Experience, Anchoring to Personal Wellbeing, Reconciling ID Role Expectations, and Cultivating Productive Relationships. These findings reveal that the transition into instructional design is not merely a career move but a deeper reorientation of professional identity, shaped by a diverse interplay of motivations—including a desire for creative autonomy, alignment with personal values, professional growth, and in some cases, the need to navigate burnout or systemic constraints in teaching roles. Participants described leveraging existing pedagogical competencies while also developing new skills in technology, collaboration, and project management.

This study contributes to the understanding of professional change and identity shifts, offering insights into how educators reconstruct meaning and purpose through career transition.

Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Educators face complex professional realities today, and as a response, some look at other opportunities present in the field of education. These educators, armed with invaluable classroom experience, are poised to make significant contributions to the field of instructional design (Nguyen et al., 2022). This research aims to unpack the motivations, challenges, and competency development of this group as they navigate the transition from teaching to instructional design roles. Bean (2014) noted that many people have inadvertently shifted into instructional design roles from various professional fields. Similarly, in the aftermath of the pandemic, many K–12 educators reflected on their career paths, with some contemplating a change due to the heightened stress experienced during that period (Jotkoff, 2022). K-12 teachers may consider transitioning into instructional design because of transferable skills. Through this transition, it is important to understand the intersection of teacher competencies and instructional designer competencies (Crompton, 2023; Martin & Ritzhaupt, 2021).

Instructional design has become important as educational techniques incorporate technology and varied learning modes in a variety of settings. Instructional designers find roles in higher education contexts in support of faculty developing new courses and program offering types. In addition, businesses are beginning to acknowledge the shift towards lifelong learning, and as a result, there is now an unprecedented need for instructional designers to support workplace learning initiatives (World Economic Forum, 2023). This has resulted in more opportunities for instructional designer positions outside of formal education but also within institutions, largely in higher education, as a support for those in teaching roles.

Career transitions happen in many professionals in different industries and each case comes with unique contexts. Individuals shift from teaching to industrial design are often driven by intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, it includes desire for personal growth and better job prospects (Newbauer, 2023). According to Bryant et al. (2023) and Hobson (n.d.), many of these moves are driven by personal goals and external changes. The motivations behind K-12 teachers transitioning to instructional design roles likely vary widely. One motivation may be a desire for professional development or a response to students' changing demands. This shift may also be influenced by a reported increase in the levels of stress among educators (Jotkoff, 2022). Unpacking these motivations provides important information about the aspirations and goals of teachers when they change professions, specifically towards instructional design roles.

As a professional field, instructional designers face hurdles within higher education while also encompassing roles in corporate and non-academic environments (Pollard and Kumar, 2022). These challenges include adapting to new technologies and methodologies, as well as shifting from a classroom-focused role to one centered on flexible design and technology-enhanced learning experiences tailored for adult learners and online environments (Pollard & Kumar, 2022). The same study also revealed that instructional designers in higher education face key challenges including the ambiguity in designated roles, lack of institutional recognition as a profession, and limited opportunities for professional development. These challenges stem from the complex and multifaceted nature of their roles, which require balancing technical skills with pedagogical expertise and collaboration with faculty. To address these issues, the authors argued that there’s a need to establish a clear definition of roles, institutional support, and enhanced professional development for instructional designers. These changes are essential in improving working conditions and effectiveness in higher education.

Transitioning into instructional design roles, teachers apply their educational expertise to create effective learning experiences outside the traditional classroom setting. In examining the personal and professional growth of teachers transitioning into instructional design roles, as discussed by Pollard and Kumar (2022), it is also important to consider the systemic barriers that may exist within both their former teaching contexts and their new professional environments. Additionally, these barriers help in understanding the broader narratives about adaptations and transformations across education sectors.

For a K–12 teacher transitioning into instructional design, several core competencies are essential. These include understanding how to manage instructional design projects, including budgeting, timelines, and stakeholder communication. Gaining a thorough understanding of various instructional design models and learning theories is also critical to ensure effective learning experiences are created. Proficiency in using advanced instructional technology and tools to develop multimedia learning materials is equally important. Additionally, instructional designers must be skilled in conducting both formative and summative evaluations to assess the effectiveness of instructional materials and programs. They should also be adept at performing thorough needs assessments to identify learning gaps and define instructional requirements. Crucially, transitioning teachers must learn to work effectively with subject matter experts (SMEs), as successful instructional design often involves close collaboration with SMEs to ensure that the content is accurate, relevant, and aligned with learning objectives. This requires strong communication, negotiation, and interpersonal skills to translate expert knowledge into engaging and instructionally sound materials.

While foundational overlaps exist between the competencies required for K-12 teachers and instructional designers, transitioning from teaching to instructional design involves acquiring

advanced project management skills, deeper knowledge of instructional design theories, and proficiency in technical tools and evaluation techniques. This comprehensive understanding will enable the effective design and development of instructional programs that meet the needs of diverse learners and organizational objectives (Crompton, 2023; Martin & Ritzhaupt, 2021).

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the motivations, challenges, and competency development of K-12 teachers transitioning into instructional design roles. As increasing numbers of educators seek career shifts due to factors such as burnout, changing job demands, and a desire for professional growth. By investigating intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, the obstacles teachers face during this shift, and the competencies they develop to succeed in instructional design, this research aims to bridge gaps in literature and offer valuable insights into how educational professionals can leverage their teaching expertise in new roles. Utilizing qualitative research methods, this study aims to explore the lived experiences of transitioning teachers, with the purpose of identifying the challenges they encounter and the factors that support their success. By examining these experiences, the research seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of career mobility in education and inform strategies to better support teachers navigating such transitions, particularly given that anecdotal evidence suggests teachers often face difficulties and uncertainties when moving between roles or educational contexts (Hobson et al., 2009).

Research Question

This study investigates the factors that drive K-12 teachers to transition into instructional design roles. It explores how intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence their motivation, the

challenges they face, and the development of essential competencies. The research seeks to understand career transitions through the lens of individual motivations, systemic or institutional support, and the process of competency development. By examining these elements, this study aims to identify the key influences that shape K-12 teachers' successful adaptation to instructional design roles. The research question that guides this study is: what factors drive K-12 teachers to transition into instructional design roles, and how do intrinsic and extrinsic factors impact their motivation, challenges, and competency development?

Significance of the Study

This section highlights the significance of the study and locates it in the literature on career transitions, the unique challenges of -12 teachers moving into the field of instructional design, and the importance of identifying and addressing issues related to this phenomenon.

Lack of Comprehensive Research on Teacher Transitions

There is a significant gap in the current educational landscape, hindering a comprehensive understanding of the transition K-12 teachers undergo when moving into instructional design roles. Despite extensive research in teaching and learning, there is a lack of focused academic investigation into the complex process of teachers transitioning to instructional design. This observation is supported by opinion pieces that highlight the practical experiences of educators who have transitioned into instructional design roles. These sources provide anecdotal evidence of the challenges and successes faced by educators, filling some of the gaps left by academic research (Newbauer, 2023).

The need for more research in this area makes it difficult to gain detailed insights into the problems, motives, and special requirements of teachers navigating this complex change (Eno,

2023). A solid knowledge basis is necessary to develop effective techniques and interventions to assist educators through this complex change. Without a detailed understanding of the factors impacting success in this transition, the aim is to understand the learning experiences of such professionals making the aforementioned transition.

As a result, the scarcity of research presents a substantial barrier to the holistic creation of comprehensive and long-term frameworks that may guide and empower teachers stepping into instructional design positions. To close this gap, it is necessary to conduct in-depth investigations into the dynamics of the teacher's journey into instructional design, examining the challenges they face, the motivations that drive them to make this transition, and the competencies required for success in their new roles. This investigation may help teachers understand the intricacies and multifaceted nature of this shift. This involves delving into the underlying reasons and driving forces behind the transition and exploring the nuanced experiences and challenges teachers face as they move away from conventional teaching. By doing so, I aim to construct a more detailed and comprehensive representation of their journey, encompassing these transition's emotional, psychological, and practical aspects in teaching practices.

Gap in Understanding Unique Challenges and Motivations

Non-peer-reviewed articles emphasize the need for a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and motivations of K-12 teachers transitioning to instructional design. The lack of an in-depth study of the issues experienced by K-12 teachers when they embark on the route of instructional design is at the forefront of this gap (Johnson et al., 2023). Creating personalized support systems becomes a challenging problem in and of itself without a detailed grasp of these

issues. However, the broader literature on career change provides important theoretical and empirical insights that can help contextualize these challenges.

McGinley et al. (2014) offer a substantive theory on career change, focusing on young hotel managers but with broader implications for professional transitions. Their study delves into the career changes particularly identifying key reasons why individuals shift careers early on. Their study challenges prevailing assumptions about job satisfaction and professional identity, suggesting that career shifts often stem from deeper structural and psychological motivations rather than mere dissatisfaction (McGinley et al., 2014). This perspective is crucial in understanding why K-12 teachers may move into instructional design, as their transition may not solely be due to job dissatisfaction but rather a re-evaluation of their professional identity and aspirations.

Similarly, Rhodes and Doering (1983) propose a comprehensive theoretical framework for career change, emphasizing both the determinants and process of career transition. They highlight the necessity for longitudinal panel studies to examine career change trajectories systematically, reinforcing the need for robust research in this domain (Rhodes & Doering, 1983). This is particularly relevant to the transition of K-12 teachers to instructional design, as existing studies do not adequately capture the longitudinal nature of their career shifts.

Carless and Arnup (2011) further contribute to the discussion by presenting a longitudinal field study investigating the antecedents and consequences of career change. Their findings underscore the influence of individual and organizational characteristics on career transitions, including personality traits, demographics, and job-related variables (Carless & Arnup, 2011). These factors likely play a role in K-12 teachers' decisions to transition into instructional design,

highlighting the importance of considering both personal motivations and institutional constraints when designing career support systems.

Sector-specific motivations and barriers play a crucial role in shaping career transitions, as different industries present unique professional expectations, work environments, and structural constraints that influence an individual's decision to change careers. In the teaching profession, motivations for career change often stem from burnout, lack of career progression opportunities, and dissatisfaction with increasing administrative workloads and policy constraints (Hogg et al., 2023). Teachers may also seek new roles that allow them to apply their instructional expertise in different settings, such as corporate training or instructional design, where they can have a broader impact on education without the pressures of classroom management. However, barriers such as credentialing requirements, skill misalignment, and the emotional attachment to teaching can make the transition challenging. In contrast, IT professionals frequently change careers due to rapid technological advancements, job instability, and the demand for continuous skill upgrading, which can create stress and job insecurity (Khapova et al., 2007). Many IT professionals are motivated by opportunities for higher salaries, greater flexibility, or the pursuit of roles with more strategic or leadership responsibilities. However, barriers such as the fast-paced nature of the industry, evolving technical requirements, and the perception of IT skills as being too specialized can make career transitions difficult (Joia & Mangia, 2017). Despite these differences, both teachers and IT professionals face the challenge of transferring their skills to new professional domains, requiring careful navigation of industry expectations and professional identity shifts. By integrating these career change perspectives with the challenges faced by K-12 teachers moving into instructional design roles, we can better understand the multifaceted nature of their transition.

Unravelling the causes of this career change is similar to identifying the drivers behind teachers' transition into instructional design. It is important to note that motives vary and might range from a desire for professional promotion to a desire to reshape educational paradigms via creative design. Understanding these motives goes beyond a theoretical exercise; it has practical implications for aiding teachers in transitioning into instructional design roles.

Importance of Identifying and Addressing Issues

It is critical to resolve the observable gaps when considering the implications for successful transition of teachers to instructional design. Opinion pieces suggest that addressing these issues can significantly enhance the success rate of teachers transitioning to instructional design roles. These articles calls for strategic interventions such as targeted professional development programs and supportive organizational policies (Bloom, 2022).

Teachers transitioning to instructional design roles must navigate a shift in which their educational expertise intersects with a more specialized technological skill set. While teaching increasingly requires familiarity with technology for classroom management and presentation, instructional design demands a deeper understanding of e-learning tools, learning management systems, multimedia production, and data-driven platforms to create effective, scalable learning experiences. This shift moves beyond using technology as a supplementary tool in teaching and into integrating technology as a foundational element of instructional design. Without a clear understanding of the aforementioned challenges, resulting in frustration, disillusionment, and, eventually, a loss of faith in the efficacy of instructional design methodologies (Stefaniak et al., 2020). Supporting teachers transitioning into instructional design roles involves comprehensively addressing their specific needs and challenges, which differ from traditional teaching roles.

To establish a comprehensive basis for this investigation, this study will address three core issues: the scarcity of focused research on K-12 teacher transitions into instructional design, the need to understand both the barriers and motivating factors in this shift, and the importance of creating a well-defined framework to guide future studies. Despite the challenges, both Hobson (n.d.) and Bryant et al. (2023) assert that the transition from teaching to instructional design can be a sensible career change that leads to professional fulfilment. This shift represents a strategic endeavour with the potential to shape the future of teaching and learning in today's dynamic educational landscape.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The following section provides an overview of the existing literature on career transition and instructional design development. The section begins with the theoretical underpinnings of career transitions, with particular emphasis on the decision- and thought-processes involved. The section also provides a general mapping of the study and where it sits in the growing literature on career transitions to instructional design.

Theoretical underpinnings

The theoretical framework serves as the foundation of the research, offering a conceptual perspective that guides and shapes the direction of the study. A theory can be described as an organized system of interconnected concepts, definitions, and propositions that offers a structured understanding of a phenomenon by delineating the relationships among variables, with the intent of explaining and forecasting observed patterns or events (Kerlinger, 1973).

Self-Determination Theory

Career transition has become a common experience for many professionals, particularly those in the academy and basic education. Studies have already explored potential covariates in these decision-making processes, and they are mostly traced back to the economic and logistical shortcomings. Logistics shortcomings hinder one from accessing benefits or delaying self-gratification. Deci and Ryan's (2000) development of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) lies at the core of the literature on career or life transitions. SDT has its origins in the earlier work of Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in the 1970s and continued to mature in the late 1990s. The theory highlights the push-and-pull factors that individuals weigh in making life-changing career decisions, and how they aspire to meet three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence,

and relatedness. Moreover, the theory highlights the natural and innate tendencies of humans to aspire for self and personal growth, better social integration, and mental well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 2000). In studying career mobility and change, SDT is relevant because it explains and visualizes the causal relationships of factors involved in career change. It moves beyond just saying "people were unhappy" and explains *how* that unhappiness turns into a decision to uproot oneself and move on to another career.

The theory's core constructs are anchored in three basic psychological needs: first, autonomy, such as the experience of social volition and self-endorsement; second, competence, or the feeling of effectiveness and capability; and lastly, relatedness to both the environment and the self. These three needs interact in a *trifecta-like* manner, where one affects the others, one way or another.

Along with the many years of research and the formulation of theoretical grounding for the SDT, there is the creation of its sub-theories. The first theoretical construct is the Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET), which highlights how social and external factors influence individuals' pre-existing intrinsic motivations through perceived autonomy and competence. For example, do professionals see their employment development as internally rewarding or tiring? The second theory related to the SDT is the Organismic Integration Theory (OIT). The theory explains that extrinsic motivations are arranged along a continuum of motivators, each with its own distinct set of autonomy levels. For example, an extrinsic motivator, such as a lack of certifications for upward career mobility, may be perceived differently by different people. One may apply for a graduate certification (autonomous action) while the other may just accept that career mobility is not for him (non-autonomous action). Both of these sub-theories were

developed by Deci and Ryan as integral components of the broader SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000).

SDT is widely used in interdisciplinary studies of motivation and decision-making. However, the most notable application of the SDT is in survey questionnaires, whose primary objective is to understand the motivations and key expectations of research subjects. To illustrate, a company may introduce a self-determining survey to identify areas for improvement in the work environment, facilities, and human resources, thereby preventing resignations from current employment. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is also widely applied across various disciplines, including sports science, healthcare, engineering, and organizational contexts such as business management, education administration, and human resource development.

However, applying SDT to professionals' career changes prompts an in-depth analysis of the push and pull factors associated with decisions to stay or move on. Student teachers with high intrinsic motivation to pursue a career in teaching have lower levels of stress-related thoughts than teachers with high extrinsic motivation, as evidenced in the study of Tillmann (2018). Their study highlights that teachers with a strong regard for financial security and stability tend to experience higher levels of stress, which may lead to a career shift. Alternatively, the study also highlighted that teachers with high intrinsic motivations (i.e. love for the profession, social work, and helping others) outweigh their extrinsic motivators, which may eventually lead to staying in the field.

Other theories also support teaching practitioners' career shifts. The Person-Environment Fit Theory, popularized by Kristof-Brown et al. (2005), suggests that teachers' career shifts may be driven by the misalignment of their expectations with the environment in which they practice,

which may prompt them to move forward into a new career path or to remain for a short period of time. Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy also explains the positive outlooks of professionals in changing careers despite their lack of necessary competence required for the job. The theory posits that individuals' positive belief on self-capacity supersedes recognition of lack of competency. The push-and-pull theory of migration is also a fitting theory, especially in matters of career upward mobility, where the most plausible option is to migrate for better opportunities. This theory is especially relevant for many teachers who find themselves weighing the options of remaining in the country with environmental familiarity or moving to a new terrain of opportunities and upward economic mobility.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

In the book *Counseling Adults in Transition: Linking Practice with Theory,* Dr. Nancy K. Schlossberg (1995) studied career transitions, which later became known as the Schlossberg Transition Theory (STT). The theory positions individuals as active agents in the process of any life transitions. To her, the transition from one stage of life to another should not be examined in isolation (per event). Rather it should be examined by its merits: nature of the transition and coping resources. Her grounded theory offers researchers and academics a precise framework for understanding transitions, especially career transitions.

In its earliest theoretical development, STT is anchored on four pillars of understanding: situation, self, support and strategies. Additionally, Schlossberg believes it is important to first understand the transition—or the lack thereof—among the individuals under study. A collective understanding of the experiences and facts surrounding decisions to change careers or engage in general life transitions is essential in further understanding the different layers of the decision-

making process. Secondly, an assessment of the coping resources follows to understand how the environment influences or converges with the situation. An individual's reaction to changes during a transitional period is also essential for examining the autonomy described in Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory. Lastly, a time for re-evaluation of the possible interventions is needed to strengthen one's coping and adaptation.

The first pillar, "situation", refers to the description of the transition, which may include timing, triggers, external factors, temporality, and other features (Evans et al., 1998). Moreover, it may refer to the storyline of events leading up to the transition and to the experiences of individuals during it. The "self" refers to the subject's personal and socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, wealth quintile, and education level (Evans et al., 1998). However, to some extent, it may also refer to individuals' traits and attributes, such as their courage level, ego, and shock tolerance. Questions like years of work experience, college degree, skills, and other personal traits fall under this category. Third, "support" refers to the wide array of social mechanisms provided to individuals during transition, such as family support, peers' encouragement, and institutional help (Evans et al., 1998). Lastly, "strategies" are coping mechanisms and responses individuals use after recognizing the situation and the support or resources they have, such as emotion regulation, avoidance, and reframing other options.

Schlossberg (1981) categorizes life transitions as either anticipated or unanticipated. Anticipated transitions are those that are planned or expected, such as graduating from school or starting a new job. These events tend to follow a predictable timeline, allowing individuals time to prepare. In contrast, unanticipated transitions occur without warning and can be more disruptive—for example, the sudden loss of employment or an unexpected illness. This distinction is useful when considering how individuals respond to change, as the level of

preparedness can significantly affect their ability to adapt. Where relevant, this framework is drawn upon in the analysis to better understand how participants experienced and made sense of the transitions in their own lives.

Initially, the theory was developed to provide a practical and clear framework for professional adult counselling. Over the years, the theory was used in other disciplines, further developing public and academic discourses on certain matters. Due to STT's straightforward, structured approach to disaggregating facts, the once-heavily used in counselling practices transitioned into a heuristic theory applicable to many disciplines in the social sciences. Additionally, as social and academic discourses developed, several covariates emerged as important factors in understanding transitions.

In 2007, Wiesenberg and Aghakhani (2007) produced a qualitative study on career changes of graduate students, whose demographic characteristics are variable from each other. Findings suggest that their enhanced knowledge of subject matter from their years in graduate studies, paired with their social and personal support systems, influenced them to change careers. These sets of reasons and covariates align with Schlossberg's theoretical assumptions for interpreting life transitions (in this case, career). The SST was also applied to the analysis of leadership transition, based on Lindstrom's (2019) findings in a thesis titled *From Community College Faculty to Dean: Using Schlossberg's Transition Theory to Understand the Transition Experience.* She found that organizational structure and planned transitional programs could either ease or complicate transitions from one leadership role to another. Again, it supports the premise of SST, emphasizing that the *situation* is affected and influenced by the pre-existing or reactionary *support system.* Interestingly, Derrick (2019) also shared the same insights as Lindstrom (2019) where the chances of job promotion also depend on how the structure of

learning was laid out prior to the promotion, such as training lessons, a grace period, and the organizational support system.

Jafar (2023) took a different approach to applying Schlossberg Transition Theory by examining the lived experiences of adult college students (ages 30 and above) and how they navigated their lives upon late entry to college. Their transition from working individuals to students is an unconventional life transition, often met with skepticism and unjust treatment. For instance, one of the research participants noted that most career fairs cater to younger students rather than to adults/late enrollees in tertiary education. However, the participants also mentioned that they found themselves offering real-life work experiences and testimonies to younger students—a purposeful response to the environment.

Expectancy-Value Theory

Both Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Schlossberg's Theory of Transition (STT) highlight the motivations involved in career change. With emphasis on motivation, some scholars look at factors that influence the development of motivation prior to enactment of plans. They seek to answer the following crucial questions: (1) What motivates people? (2) What are their expectations in reaching the goal? And (3) what will they get in reaching the goal. Applying these core questions in the context of career change, expectancy-value theory (EVT) seeks to ask the expectancies and values that K-12 teachers see in changing careers.

K-12 teachers' expectations may come from both the past and present experiences as well as their future aspirations. The temporal component involved in EVT highlights the role that accumulated work experience plays in changing careers. Some "career changers" may have had previous episodes of career change, and such experience builds a tangible expectation for the

future move. The value of career change is also highlighted in EVT as it seeks to explore the satisfaction gained or to be gained from changing careers.

Career change from one profession to another

Career change is part of the broader concept of career mobility. It involves a multifaceted, multilayered process of rational decision-making in which individuals assess their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. As described by Akkermans et al. (2024), transitions are often multiphase, sometimes overlapping, and multidimensional, underscoring the need for more longitudinal studies to capture the evolution of structural and contextual constraints.

Steindórsdóttir et al. (2023) supported this by studying a longitudinal cohort for 10–15 years and observing both vertical and horizontal career mobility. Their study, which drew on 93 quantitative longitudinal studies conducted in the United States, found that upward mobility (promotions) predicted higher objective success, often reflected in material gains such as increased salaries and improved possessions. Conversely, horizontal mobility, defined as lateral job changes or transfers across departments that broaden skills and experiences, did not necessarily guarantee material advancement, as outcomes depended on the timing and nature of the decision.

In 2021, data from the Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) program revealed a substantial increase in job-switching activity, with industry-specific trends and wage implications for workers making transitions (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Findings further indicated industry-level differences and wage consequences for job changers. This study offered a different perspective on career change and the factors influencing its success. To the LEHD

researchers, the success of changing careers is heavily tied to the strength of one's professional networks and social adaptability.

Among the many industries in the United States, the healthcare and tech industries are most positively impacted by career changes. However, they also have a fair share of problems that are catalysts for career change among healthcare professionals. In the study by Brewer et al. (2016), nurses' decision to change careers is primarily driven by a desire for work-life balance. Their study also concluded that due to the difficult scheduling of work and tasks, burnout is common and influenced their decision to change careers. Brazier et al. (2025) conducted a qualitative study on career changes of 18 adults in Switzerland. Using temporal thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews, involuntary change in careers surfaced as a byproduct of their social isolation, institutional barriers, and coping mechanisms.

The COVID-19 Pandemic Effect

The COVID-19 pandemic further brought challenges to people, particularly in matters concerning employment. The global lockdown temporarily halted both human mobility and daily routines, forcing much of the global population to adapt to remote work. This disruption prompted a widespread re-evaluation of priorities, as evidenced in the study of Cao and Hamori (2022), which found that many young professionals transitioned to need-based employment to meet personal and family needs. Need-based employment refers to jobs that provide financial stability through consistent income. Before this transition, several of these professionals had been engaged in talent- or value-based employment, which was more aligned with personal interests and self-fulfillment. However, these individuals were among those most affected by the pandemic-induced career shocks.

Overall, the pandemic caused significant anxiety and uncertainty for educators and learners. It was a real challenge for educators and learners new to online or distance learning (Bozkurt et al., 2020). Francom, Lee and Pinkney (2021) studied teachers' technological adjustments during the pandemic and found that they relied heavily on their prior knowledge of learning platforms, while remote learning made it difficult to assess students' performance. These challenges were further intensified by the sudden shift in the learning environment during the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring teachers to rapidly adapt their teaching practices (Kim and Asbury, 2020).

Another effect of the COVID-19 on professionals was best described by Akkermans (2020) as a "career shock", wherein both skills and mental health of professionals transitioned from "stable" to "mobile". Changes in professional outlooks were mainly driven by government-mandated isolation, providing each individual with more time to think about their future. The COVID-19 pandemic has widely introduced the concept of "online work" or "remote work", further reaping realizations that work-life balance is possible. These realizations and think-opportunities provided by the pandemic, are significant predictors of dissatisfaction and career change (Eurofound, 2021).

Emotions in Career Change

In Australia, a study by Carless and Arnup (2011) showed that, on average, the 132 career changers (study participants) are generally happy and satisfied with their decision, despite receiving a minimum salary increase. It makes sense that, in the sample, career change is not predicted by salary but by job security and occupation tenure.

It is important to stress that a career change is an active and rational decision, the result of a multi-layered decision-making process. Such decisions are made from multiple assessments of the stakes and self-prediction of unforeseen circumstances. As evidenced in Ibarra's (2002) online article on 39 mid-career professionals in the United States, most feared changing careers due to a general, universal fear of failing and not meeting expectations. The study only shows the other side of career change – the decision to stay. Despite tons of options to change career, the fear of change remains.

There is also evidence of post-change identity loss and confusion among individuals who changed careers. Masdonati et al. (2022) describe involuntary career changes as "characterized by moments of loneliness that reflected the inadequacy of available support and a sense of shame associated with the status of career changer" (Abstract, para. 1).

Unconventional Career Change Perspectives

Some studies also yielded results supporting unconventional perspectives on career change among professionals. A mixed-method study of 250 employees across many US industries and companies found that growth and purpose are also strong motivators for staying or leaving a job. One may leave a stable job if they feel unsatisfied with the working environment or a lack of personal development. The altruistic agenda of social work, along with meaningful engagement with communities, drove social workers away from their previous professions.

K-12 Teacher Education

To become a certified K–12 teacher in British Columbia, candidates must complete an approved teacher education program, typically a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.), and obtain certification through the Teacher Regulation Branch of the BC Ministry of Education and Child

Care. Teacher education programs in the province combine academic coursework with supervised practicum placements that allow candidates to gain practical experience in classroom settings. Despite these structured programs, research suggests that many new teachers feel underprepared for the realities of full-time teaching when they first enter the profession. Studies on early-career teachers consistently highlight challenges such as heavy workloads, classroom management, and addressing the diverse learning needs of students (Karsenti & Collin, 2013). International research similarly indicates that beginning teachers often report limited preparation for key aspects of teaching practice, including student assessment, classroom management, and supporting students with special educational needs (OECD, 2019). Evidence from British Columbia reflects these broader patterns. The British Columbia New Teacher Survey 2021/22 found that many early-career teachers described their transition into the profession as stressful and insufficiently supported, citing high workloads, limited mentorship, and gaps between teacher education preparation and the practical demands of classroom teaching (St. Clair, 2023).

In British Columbia, newly certified teachers commonly begin their careers as Teachers Teaching on Call (TTOCs), a form of substitute teaching, before securing temporary or continuing contracts. This transitional stage can create financial uncertainty and professional instability for early-career teachers as they attempt to gain consistent employment. Data from the British Columbia New Teacher Survey 2021/22 shows that although most respondents were employed as teachers, only about 70.8% held full-time contracts, while approximately 15.1% worked primarily as TTOCs and others combined substitute teaching with part-time positions (St. Clair, 2023). The report also indicates that employment stability tends to improve gradually over time, as teachers with more years since certification are significantly more likely to hold full-time contracts than recent graduates. This pathway reflects structural patterns within the

provincial education system, where new teachers often spend several years in temporary or on-call roles before obtaining continuing positions. Although urban districts such as Vancouver may have greater competition for permanent teaching roles, rural and remote districts frequently experience teacher shortages and may provide faster access to stable employment. However, teachers working in these areas may face challenges such as geographic isolation and fewer opportunities for professional mentorship or collaboration.

Professional development (PD) is another important aspect of teacher development in British Columbia. Teachers are encouraged to engage in ongoing professional learning throughout their careers through district initiatives, professional development days, and union-supported programs organized by the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF). However, access to meaningful professional learning opportunities can vary across school districts depending on funding, available resources, and geographic location (OECD, 2019). These disparities became particularly visible during the COVID-19 pandemic, when schools across Canada and globally were forced to shift rapidly to remote and hybrid forms of learning. Many teachers had to adapt quickly to digital platforms and online teaching methods while continuing to support students academically and emotionally (OECD, 2021). This sudden transition significantly increased teacher workload and stress levels, as educators redesigned lessons, attempted to maintain student engagement in virtual environments, and addressed the socio-emotional impacts of the pandemic on students.

At the same time, the expectations placed on teachers in British Columbia have continued to expand in response to broader educational reforms. Teachers are increasingly expected to integrate Indigenous perspectives, reconciliation initiatives, and inclusive learning practices into their teaching, reflecting commitments outlined in the province's education policies and

curriculum frameworks. While these initiatives are widely supported as part of efforts to promote equity and reconciliation in education, they also require additional training, resources, and institutional support for teachers to implement them effectively. When combined with heavy workloads, administrative demands, and the emotional labour associated with teaching, these pressures have contributed to concerns about teacher stress and retention within the profession (OECD, 2019). As a result, some educators have begun exploring alternative career pathways that allow them to apply their pedagogical expertise in different contexts. One such pathway is instructional design, where the skills developed through teaching—such as curriculum development, assessment design, and learner engagement—can be applied in corporate training, higher education, and digital learning environments (OECD, 2021). In this way, the training and professional experiences of K–12 teachers in British Columbia not only shape classroom practice but also intersect with broader career opportunities across the evolving education and learning technology sectors.

The Rise of Online Learning and Its Impact on K–12 Educators' Career Decisions

The shift to online learning, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has become one of the most significant transformations in the global education sector. While remote education has existed in various forms for decades, the pandemic created a sudden, large-scale transition to digital modes of teaching. This rapid shift posed serious challenges for K–12 teachers around the world, especially those who were unprepared for the technological and pedagogical demands of online instruction.

For many educators, this shift represented a crisis point in their careers. In some contexts, such as the Philippines, the challenges were exacerbated by pre-existing systemic issues. To

mend the gap between basic education and international employability, the implementation of the K–12 program in 2011 aimed to add two additional years in high school to complete a 12-year basic education. However, it placed strain on the pre-existing and perennial problems in the education system, including insufficient preparation, inadequate budgeting, and a shortage of qualified teachers. As a result, many university faculty were tasked with teaching in secondary schools. When the pandemic struck, these already overburdened educators faced additional pressures, including insufficient training in online teaching methods, lack of digital infrastructure, and stagnant or reduced salaries. As anecdotal evidence and emerging literature suggest, many teaching professionals began to seek better paying or less stressful opportunities in different sectors.

However, the impact of online learning has not been uniform across countries or even across provinces within Canada. In Canada, for instance, while the infrastructure for online teaching was relatively more accessible, teachers still faced significant psychological and professional challenges. Research indicates that Canadian K–12 teachers experienced heightened stress and anxiety during remote teaching periods (Pressley et al., 2021). The sudden transition to digital learning environments introduced new kinds of emotional labor — managing students remotely, dealing with parents, maintaining student engagement, and adapting lesson plans for digital platforms — all of which contributed to feelings of burnout.

Moreover, teachers who worked remotely reported a profound sense of isolation and disconnection from their professional communities (Kush et al., 2022). The lack of in-person interaction with both students and colleagues altered the core of the teaching experience, reducing opportunities for collaboration, mentorship, and emotional support.

Interestingly, while some educators found online teaching to be an overwhelming burden, others viewed it as an opportunity for professional growth or reinvention. For technologically adept teachers, the pivot to digital platforms sparked interest in fields such as instructional design, education technology development, or remote education consultancy (Trust & Whalen, 2021). In some cases, this interest translated into a full-fledged career change, particularly for those who had already been experiencing dissatisfaction with classroom teaching. Thus, the emergence of online learning functioned as a double-edged sword: for some, it intensified existing challenges and pushed them further toward leaving the profession; for others, it opened new career paths that aligned more closely with their evolving professional goals.

Even prior to the pandemic, career transitions among K–12 teachers in Canada were becoming more common. For example, Karsenti and Collin (2013), in their nationwide study Why Are New Teachers Leaving the Profession? found that heavy workloads and classroom realities were driving many early-career educators to leave teaching. This was echoed in earlier findings by Fontaine et al. (2011), who noted that lack of preparation in classroom management was a key factor in early exits. The pandemic and the rapid shift to online learning only amplified these existing stressors, making the profession increasingly unsustainable for many.

The Field of Instructional Design

Instructional design has recently become an important field of study, especially given how the profession incorporates technology and diverse learning modes. Connected to the demand is the transition of K-12 teachers to instructional design. The reasons for this, as discussed in the previous section, vary widely depending on their individual contexts. One motivation may be a desire for professional development or a response to students' changing

demands. A reported increase may also influence this shift in educators' stress levels (Jotkoff, 2022). It is important to unpack these motivations and provide salient information about the underpinnings of their professional transitions, specifically towards instructional roles. Unravelling these motivations will provide important insights into teachers' desires and goals when they change professions, particularly towards instructional design roles.

As discussed in the preceding sections, the COVID-19 pandemic served as a significant precursor to the popularity of instructional design and the broader concept of "learning" on social media. The unprecedented pause in global mobility, known in some regions as a worldwide lockdown, disrupted international trade. However, the education sector adapted to the worldwide lockdown by transitioning online, unlike some other industries. The pandemic not only introduced and advanced the concept of online learning but also offered teaching professionals the opportunity to improve themselves and further develop their skills.

The demand for instructional designers has increased over the years. The demand for such jobs exists not only in academia but also in corporations, private businesses, healthcare, and non-governmental organizations. In some cases, instructional designers are also called instructional technologists, whose primary work is to provide technical training to other members of their organizations. This is also the very same reason why some institutions still find it difficult to categorize an instructional designer as a professional or a sub-profession of another (Nworie, 2022). The scope of work of instructional designers also saw a dramatic change, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic (Petherbridge et al., 2023). Post-pandemic instructional design has adapted to the growing demand for accessibility, increased collaboration driven by higher volume, and the emergence of new technological developments.

Prior to the pandemic, teaching professionals had already equipped themselves with the basics of instructional design; however, most of them are not knowledgeable of the concept yet. Hence, not aware of their skillset yet. When the global pandemic disrupted traditional face-to-face classes, online learning platforms enabled students to continue learning. Chaudhuri (2024) explored teachers' narratives in the United States, particularly their use of instructional strategies to provide online learning during *emergency remote teaching*. In this study, the author concluded that the most common instructional strategies are direct instruction and focusing on critical learning content, both of which are simplified with visual aids and digital materials.

The common skills and performance requirements in instructional design draw individuals to shift from one profession to another. Many of these transitions were driven by intrinsic personal goals and external motivators. Intrinsic personal goals are innate to oneself, such as the aspiration to work in a profession that aligns with one's personal values. External motivators are factors beyond the actor's control, such as inadequate compensation, excessive workloads, and improved work-life balance (Bryant et al., 2023; Hobson, n.d.).

Shared skillsets of K-12 Teachers and Instructional Designers

Both instructional designers and teachers need strong communication skills, a commitment to continuous professional development, and the ability to use technology effectively. Both roles require an understanding of how students learn and the ability to design learning experiences that meet diverse needs. However, instructional designers often need more advanced skills in project management, detailed knowledge of instructional theories, and expertise in designing a wide range of instructional materials. They must be adept at conducting needs assessments and evaluations to ensure that instructional programs are effective and meet

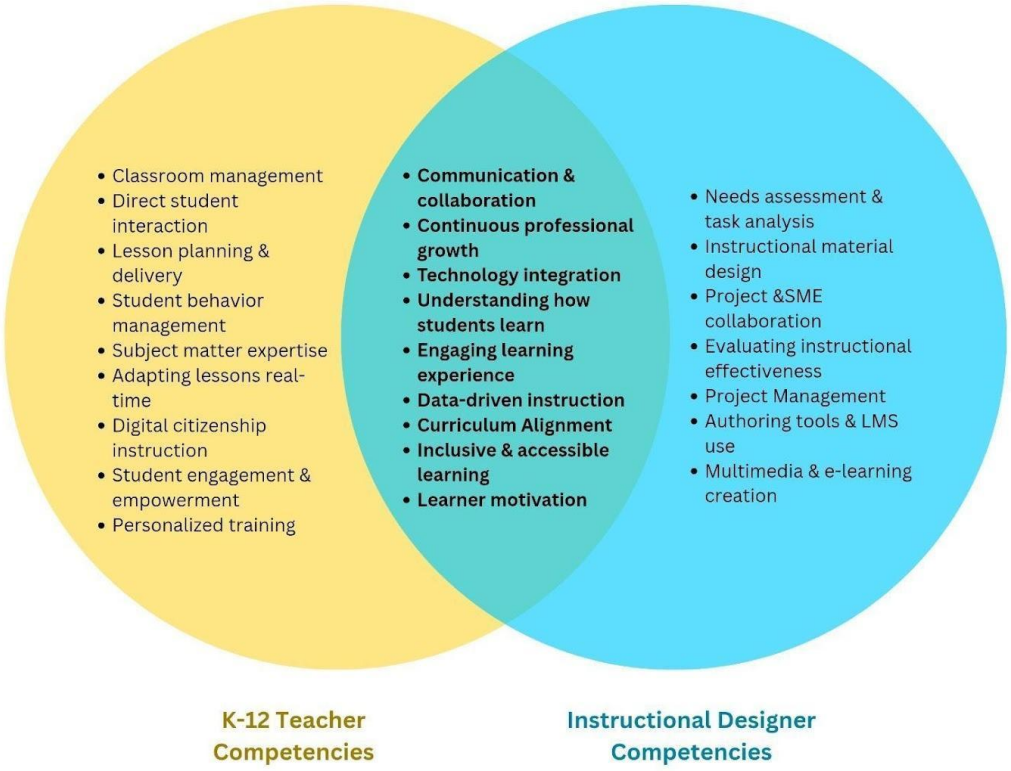
organizational goals. Instructional designers usually work alongside subject matter experts and collaborate with them to develop learning experiences, ensuring that content is accurate and pedagogically sound.

On the other hand, K-12 teachers focus more on direct student interaction, classroom management, and fostering a positive learning environment. Teachers are unique in that they serve as both subject matter experts and learning designers. They create and deliver lesson plans that not only address the required curriculum but also engage students in meaningful ways. Teachers must continuously assess student understanding and adapt their instructional strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students. This dual role of being both the expert in the content and the designer of the learning experience allows teachers to be highly responsive to the immediate educational needs of their students, something that is crucial in a classroom setting.

Figure 1 below illustrates the conceptual differences and overlaps in the roles of K-12 teachers and instructional designers, highlighting key competencies required for both. The diagram shows that while both professions require strong communication skills, technology use, and student learning understanding, instructional designers are more focused on managing projects and designing a range of instructional materials. On the other hand, teachers emphasize direct interaction with students and classroom management.

Figure 1

The shared competencies of K-12 teachers and instructional designers



Note. This image developed by the researcher is a Venn diagram that compares and contrasts the competencies of K-12 teachers and instructional designers, with the shared competencies displayed in the overlapping section. The left circle represents K-12 teacher competencies, which include classroom management, direct student interaction, lesson planning and delivery, student behavior management, subject matter expertise, adapting lessons in real-time, digital citizenship instruction, student engagement and empowerment, and personalized learning. The right circle focuses on instructional designer competencies, such as needs assessment and task analysis, instructional material design, project and subject matter expert collaboration, evaluating instructional effectiveness, project management, authoring tools and learning management

system use, and multimedia and e-learning creation. The overlapping section highlights the shared competencies between the two roles, which include communication and collaboration, continuous professional growth, technology integration, understanding how students learn, engaging learning experiences, data-driven instruction, curriculum alignment, inclusive and accessible learning, and learner motivation. This diagram effectively illustrates the unique and shared skills of these professions, underscoring their interconnected goals and practices.

The Role of an Instructional Designer

An instructional designer is responsible for designing learning experiences, with most of these jobs requiring instructional design knowledge. Instructional design is considered a core competency of such learning and development professionals, involving behaviours like extracting, analyzing, organizing, and synthesizing information. Additionally, there are 5 archetypes that best describe instructional designers: Problem Solver, Artist, User, Counsellor, and Performer, each highlighting different core competencies and roles within the field of instructional design (Sugar & Betrus, 2002). Competencies include various abilities, from technical knowledge of instructional design tools to pedagogical competence in creating meaningful and successful learning experiences. Recognising and developing these competencies is critical for teachers' individual success and the general improvement of educational processes. To get started with instructional design, one must acquire a wide range of abilities and knowledge. There are some overlaps and differences in the key competencies involved in instructional designers and teachers; and they are all crucial in understanding career transitions.

The International Board of Standards for Training, Performance, and Instruction (IBSTPI) expressed that instructional designers need competencies across five domains:

Professional Foundations, Planning and Analysis, Design and Development, Evaluation and Implementation, and Management. These competencies include project management, understanding and applying learning theories, designing and developing instructional materials, conducting needs assessments, and evaluating instructional effectiveness (Martin & Ritzhaupt, 2021). The competencies outlined for instructional designers include professional ethics, continuous professional development, needs assessment, task analysis, creation of instructional materials, use of technology, development of assessments, formative and summative evaluations, continuous improvement of instructional materials, and project management.

Across educational jurisdictions, teacher competency standards help define and support professional practice. In British Columbia (BC), the Ministry of Education outlines eight professional standards for educators, which are intended to guide teachers in their conduct, professional growth, and instructional responsibilities (Government of British Columbia, 2019). These standards emphasize the importance of ethical and inclusive practice, a deep understanding of curriculum and pedagogy, commitment to student learning and well-being, and the cultivation of collaborative learning communities. Specifically, BC educators are expected to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of learners' needs and diversity (Standard 3), use assessment and planning to support individual learning (Standard 5), and engage in ongoing professional learning and reflective practice (Standard 7) (Government of British Columbia, 2019). These foundational expectations mirror many competencies required in instructional design, particularly in areas such as learner analysis, instructional planning, continuous improvement, and ethical practice. As K-12 educators consider transitioning into instructional design roles, the alignment between teacher standards and instructional design competencies offers a pathway for leveraging existing strengths while also identifying new areas for growth.

Conversely, the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) outlines standards for educators that emphasize leveraging technology to enhance learning and foster a digital learning environment. These standards include being a learner, leader, citizen, collaborator, designer, facilitator, and analyst (Crompton, 2023). The competencies for K-12 teachers as per ISTE standards include engaging in continuous professional development, inspiring student empowerment and success, promoting digital citizenship, working with colleagues and students to improve practice and share resources, creating authentic, technology-enhanced learning experiences, using technology to support student learning and creativity, and using data to drive instruction and support student achievement.

Developing an instructional design skill set is critical to the success of this career move. Competencies include a range of abilities, from technical knowledge of instructional design tools to pedagogical competence in creating meaningful and successful learning experiences. Recognizing and developing these competencies is critical for teachers' individual success and the general improvement of educational processes. To get started with instructional design, one must acquire a wide range of abilities and knowledge. Sugar and Betrus (2002) described instructional designers in terms of five archetypes. Firstly, instructional designers are problem solvers, as they focus on identifying learning needs and navigating the steep learning curve. Secondly, instructional designers are creative artists expected to deliver visually appealing designs for their products and learning materials. Thirdly, they are likely to conduct a thorough examination of their work through the lens of a third-person learner to assess whether it is effective. Fourthly, instructional designers are expected to act as counsellors, listening to learners' needs. Lastly, they are expected to communicate their thoughts and lessons persuasively to their listeners.

Despite the commonality of the characteristics and skills related to instructional design, practitioners in higher education face hurdles and challenges, as highlighted by Pollard and Kumar (2022). They cited that, among the challenges faced, adapting to technologies and new methodologies proved the most difficult. The difficulty in adjusting to the new system is also accompanied by confusion about their identity as duly members of the academe, and the authors suggested that there is an urgent need to redefine the scope of responsibilities of instructional designers, especially in the academe. Although the transition into instructional design also creates an opportunity for teachers to express creative teaching methods, as suggested by Pollard and Kumar (2022), it is still essential to analyze systemic barriers within their profession. Additionally, these changes indicate broader narratives about adaptations and transformations across education sectors.

The Gap in the Literature

This study aims to contribute to the emerging literature on instructional design globally. The application of career transition/change among teaching professionals to instructional design is highlighted in my work by examining their extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. This study further emphasizes that the theoretical underpinnings related to career choices, as rational and agentic decision making, have already been well-established. Citing the works of Deci and Ryan (1985) and Schlossberg et al. (1995), both provide a multi-level approach in understanding the possible motivators and external factors that may have influenced career change.

At the micro level, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a useful framework for analyzing the internal motivational processes and agentic decision-making that some teaching professionals undergo when choosing to transition into a career in instructional design. This

theoretical lens helps explain how individuals experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness during the decision-making process. At the meso and macro levels, support from both peers and non-peers plays a significant role in shaping the transition experience. These social and professional support systems can either reduce or increase the stress associated with career change, influencing overall well-being and job satisfaction. In parallel, Schlossberg's Transition Theory offers a situational perspective that focuses on how individuals perceive and respond to transitions, emphasizing the importance of the specific context, timing, and resources available. This theory helps clarify how situational variables affect an individual's ability to adapt to and manage a career shift effectively.

Given the current state of the literature on career transitions, particularly for K-12 teachers transitioning to instructional design, it is difficult to gain detailed insights into the broader landscape of this particular area. Therefore, there is a need to develop a study that could serve as a benchmark for future research on career transitions into instructional design. This substantial barrier presents an opportunity for my study to fill a gap in the literature on career transitions and to offer a long-term framework that could guide and empower teachers planning to make decisions to move from one profession to another.

The core of this study is to contribute to research on the lived experiences of teachers transitioning to instructional design. It examines the challenges they faced, the motivations that drove them to their new careers, and the competencies required for their new roles. Further, the study will help the teaching professionals understand the complex and multifaceted nature of career shift, which involves deep dive into the underlying predicaments and behind-the-scenes forces of transition; and exploring the nuanced experiences and challenges teachers face as they move away from conventional teaching. By doing so, this study establishes a more detailed and

comprehensive representation of their journey, encompassing the emotional, psychological, and practical aspects of these transitions in teaching practices.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework that guided this qualitative study, which explores the lived experiences of Canadian K–12 teachers who have transitioned into roles as instructional designers. The research was informed by a phenomenological orientation within a broader interpretivist paradigm, seeking to privilege participants' subjective perspectives and lived meanings over objective or generalizable truths. Given that professional transitions are not merely logistical shifts but transformations of identity, purpose, and social meaning, it was essential to adopt a methodological approach that would allow such depth to emerge.

By engaging deeply with participants' narratives, this chapter details how their transitions were understood not just as career changes but as processes of reconstruction, reorientation, and realignment with personal values and professional aspirations. The methodological decisions made throughout this study reflect an ethic of attentiveness to experience (van Manen, 2016) and a commitment to constructing knowledge with rather than about participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The sections that follow detail the purpose and scope of the inquiry, the philosophical underpinnings of the research design, and the procedures for data collection, participant recruitment, thematic analysis, and ethical engagement. A multi-theoretical lens—drawing from Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Schlossberg, 1984), provided further scaffolding for interpreting the nuanced and multi-layered nature of participants' transitions.

Research Purpose and Guiding Question

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of former Canadian K–12 educators who transitioned into ID roles. Within this overarching aim, the research focused on three core dimensions:

1. Motivational drivers for making the transition—both intrinsic and extrinsic;
2. Barriers and challenges encountered during the process;
3. Competencies transferred from teaching or developed anew to succeed in instructional design.

This study conceptualises the transition from teacher to instructional designer as a professional reorientation, involving shifts in identity, cultural belonging, values alignment, and competence development. Teachers are not merely changing job descriptions; they are reconfiguring the very structures of their work lives, the social relations they inhabit, and the purpose they assign to their roles as educators and designers of learning. Such transitions warrant a close, phenomenologically grounded investigation that foregrounds meaning-making, uncertainty, and adaptation.

Accordingly, the study was guided by the following central research question:

> What factors drive K–12 teachers to transition into instructional design roles, and how do intrinsic and extrinsic factors impact their motivation, challenges, and competency development?

This question is both exploratory and interpretive, not aimed at prediction or quantification, but rather at understanding how meaning is constructed and reconstructed through the lived

experience of professional transition. While blog posts, online forums, and grey literature suggest that this career pathway is increasingly common, scholarly inquiry remains limited. By systematically engaging with participants' perspectives, this study aims to advance a more nuanced, theory-informed understanding of the teacher-to-ID transition as a phenomenon of contemporary professional life.

Research Design and Philosophical Orientation

This section outlines the framework of the study and its philosophical orientation. The section begins with the study's methodological commitment, followed by its epistemological grounding and the researcher's reflexivity.

Phenomenology as Methodological Commitment

This study adopts a phenomenological research design, rooted in the philosophical traditions of Husserl (1960) and Heidegger (1962), and elaborated methodologically by scholars such as van Manen (2016) and Moustakas (1994). Phenomenology seeks to uncover the structures of experience as they are lived and perceived by individuals, prior to theoretical abstraction or generalisation. It focuses not on the objective world per se, but on the "lifeworld" from the German word Lebenswelt—the world as it is experienced in consciousness (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973).

In choosing phenomenology, the researcher embraced a stance of phenomenological reduction—an intentional bracketing of prior assumptions to attend to the meanings participants themselves assign to their experiences. The aim is not to speak for participants, but to provide a framework for understanding how they make sense of their experiences, and what significance they attach to their journeys. Phenomenology, in this sense, is not merely a method but a way of

being-in-research—an ethic of listening, attending, and dwelling in the complexity of lived narratives (Husserl, 1958; van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994).

The methodological commitments of phenomenology align strongly with the topic at hand. Career transitions—especially those involving the departure from public education and entrance into corporate or postsecondary instructional design—are marked by ambiguity, affect, aspiration, and loss. Phenomenology allows these dimensions to emerge, resisting the tendency to reduce them to merely skill gaps or professional strategies.

Epistemological Grounding: Interpretivism

The research is situated within an interpretivist epistemology, which asserts that reality is socially constructed, mediated through language, culture, and individual interpretation (Crotty, 1998). Interpretivism challenges the objectivist pursuit of truth and instead acknowledges the plurality of realities—each shaped by the knower's position, history, and context.

Under this paradigm, the researcher is not a neutral observer but a co-constructor of meaning. Data is not "discovered" but negotiated between researcher and participant, mediated through language, interview structure, and interpretive frameworks. The insights derived in this study are therefore not presented as "findings" in the positivist sense, but as interpretive renderings—offerings that illuminate but do not claim to exhaust the complexity of participants' experiences.

Interpretivism also recognises the inevitability of researcher subjectivity. Rather than viewing this as a source of bias to be eliminated, it is embraced as a resource for interpretation, provided it is made transparent and reflexively managed. Throughout the research process, the

researcher maintained an attitude of critical self-awareness, recording assumptions, positionalities, and interpretive tensions in a reflexive journal.

Researcher Positioning and Reflexivity

While I do not share the professional identity of a former K–12 teacher, I worked as an instructional designer in a corporate setting. This dual positioning—as both outsider to the teaching profession and insider to the field of learning design—shaped how I approached the research. My distance from the teaching profession allowed me to listen with genuine curiosity, uncluttered by assumptions about what it means to teach in K–12 environments. Conversely, my familiarity with instructional design enabled me to engage deeply with participants' language, processes, and professional contexts.

This duality positioned me as what Dwyer and Buckle (2009) describe as an "insider-outsider" researcher, whose in-between location can offer both analytical detachment and relational empathy. I was mindful, however, of the risks of either over-identifying or misrepresenting, and so adopted a reflexive stance throughout. My field journal, described later in this chapter, was used to document both emotional and cognitive responses to interviews, emerging codes, and theoretical linkages. These reflections served not only as an audit trail but also as a means of deepening analytic integrity.

Participant Recruitment

Recruitment Strategy

Participant recruitment followed a two-stage, multi-platform strategy informed by qualitative sampling principles, particularly the use of purposive and snowball sampling

techniques (Patton, 2015). The study sought to intentionally identify individuals who could provide rich, experiential accounts of transitioning from K–12 teaching into instructional design roles. These transitions were treated as purposeful samples of a unique professional population—not for generalisability, but for depth, complexity, and variation in experience.

Recruitment was initiated via targeted outreach on professional platforms, particularly LinkedIn and Facebook groups dedicated to instructional designers and educators considering career changes. A succinct yet informative post was created outlining the research purpose, participant criteria, and interview expectations. Prospective participants were directed to complete a screening and consent form hosted on Microsoft Forms, accessed via the university's secure institutional license. This form served both as a gatekeeping mechanism and a tool for early rapport building.

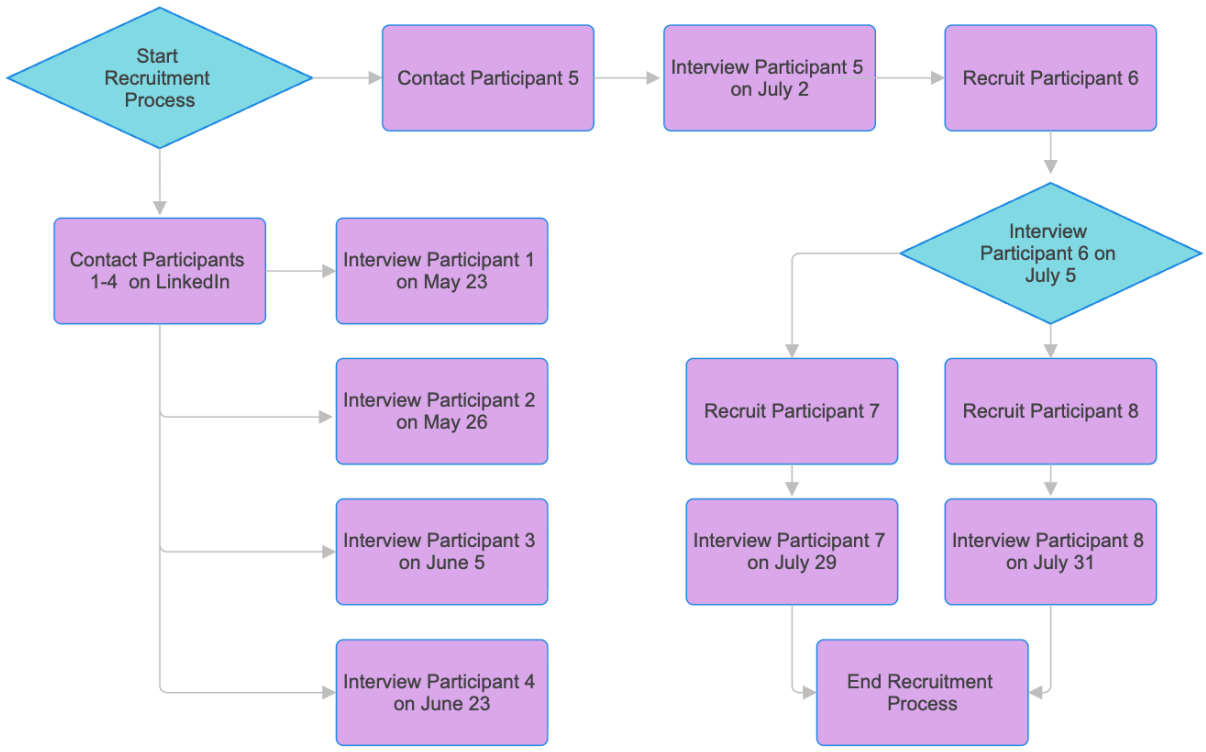
The form collected demographic details, verified alignment with inclusion criteria, and provided an opportunity for participants to self-identify availability and interest. Eligible participants had to meet the following criteria:

- A minimum of two years of experience teaching in a Canadian K–12 educational setting;
- Current or recent work in a learning design, instructional design, or related learning experience design role;
- Currently residing in Canada and working in any capacity as an instructional designer in an organization, regardless of title (Instructional Designer, Learning Experience Designer, Learning Designer, Training Content Developer, eLearning Specialist).

Once the first round of interviews had been completed, snowball sampling was employed to reach additional participants. Interviewees were asked to refer peers or colleagues who fit the study's criteria and might be interested in sharing their experiences. Some participants even voluntarily referred their colleagues without prompting, reflecting a strong sense of community and mutual support among educators navigating this professional transition. This strategy proved particularly useful in reaching individuals whose transition narratives were not highly visible in public forums.

Figure 2

Participant recruitment process



Note. This flow diagram illustrates the dual entry pathways—open call and snowball referral—used to cultivate a sample that was both relevant and diverse.

Sample Size and Participant Profile

Sampling Rationale

Eight participants were recruited for this study, aligning with recommendations for phenomenological inquiry, which typically involve between 5 and 10 participants to allow for in-depth, idiographic analysis (Dukes, 1984; Polkinghorne, 1989). The objective was not numerical saturation, as understood in grounded theory, but rather thematic sufficiency—the point at which new interviews no longer yielded fundamentally novel insights and where variation within shared themes became analytically manageable (Malterud et al., 2016).

Each participant brought unique perspectives shaped by their teaching contexts, reasons for leaving the profession, sectoral destinations (e.g., higher education, non-profit, corporate), and socio-cultural identities. The emphasis was on thematic representativeness—capturing the range of ways that transition is lived and understood—rather than statistical distribution.

Table 1

Participant demographic profile

Participant	Number of Years in K-12 Teaching	Grade Levels Taught	Graduate Certificate /Degree	Job Status at the time of transition
BW	3	8-12	No	Transitioned from a teaching role to a full-time position in professional development, and subsequently to a full-time role in curriculum design/instructional design.

CB	18	7-12	Yes	Employed under a temporary teaching contract at the time of transition.
CH	12.5	3-4	Yes	Worked as a release teacher and held a permanent teaching contract. They had been on a permanent contract since graduating from teacher education.
EC	12	9-12	Yes	Between years nine and ten of teaching, took a half-year of educational leave followed by a one-and-a-half-year secondment to a K–12 coding and robotics education program. At the time of leaving teaching, had held a permanent contract for approximately 11 years.
JR	3.5	3-7, 8-12	Yes	Worked casually as a graduate student and substitute teacher at the time of transition.
KC	3	9-12	Yes	Employed under a temporary teaching contract at the time of transition.
KW	4	3-5	No	Was working as a substitute teacher; their temporary contract had recently ended.
SD	16	8-12	Yes	Unemployed at the time of transition. Had previously held a permanent teaching position but resigned to relocate to another city, where they began working as a full-time instructional designer.

Interview Design and Rationale

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews, a method consistent with phenomenological and interpretivist inquiry (Seidman, 2006; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Semi-structured interviewing allows participants to construct their narratives in their own words while offering enough scaffolding to elicit depth, consistency, and cross-participant comparability.

Each interview was conducted over Zoom, using a university-provided institutional license that ensured secure audio and video recording. The decision to use Zoom reflected both pragmatic concerns (geographic dispersion of participants) and the affordances of digital interviews to generate rapport and reflection in virtual spaces (Archibald et al., 2019). Interviews lasted between 45 to 60 minutes, providing sufficient time for narrative unfolding while respecting participants' availability.

The interview protocol was informed by the study's research questions and theoretical frameworks (see Appendix D). Questions were grouped around six thematic domains:

1. Motivations for leaving K–12 teaching;
2. Catalysts and entry points into instructional design;
3. Transitional barriers and challenges;
4. Transferred competencies from teaching to ID;
5. Newly developed competencies;
6. Reflections on identity, purpose, and values in the new role.

Transcription and Verification

Interviews were recorded with participant consent using Zoom's built-in recording feature. Transcription was initially performed using Zoom's automated transcription tool, followed by a line-by-line review and correction to ensure accuracy, coherence, and fidelity to the spoken word. This multi-step process allowed the researcher to re-engage deeply with the data and provided an early opportunity for developing initial analytic insights.

Member Checking

In line with best practices for qualitative rigour (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), each participant was invited to review and confirm the accuracy of their transcript. All participants agreed to the use of their data as corrected and indicated that their experiences had been accurately captured. This process not only enhanced credibility but also reaffirmed participants' agency in shaping the representational integrity of the research.

Field Notes and Reflexive Journaling

During and immediately following each interview, I maintained a field journal—a blend of analytic memoing and reflexive documentation. While not structured as a formal field log, the journal functioned as a space for exploratory thinking, emotional processing, and thematic hunches. Initial impressions, emerging tensions, and contradictions were recorded. Though less systematic than formal ethnographic field notes, this practice proved essential in surfacing blind spots, tracking evolving understandings, and maintaining ethical attentiveness to the interpretive process.

Thematic Analysis

Analytic Framework and Rationale

The process of data analysis was guided by the six-phase model of thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis offers a theoretically flexible yet methodologically rigorous framework for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning across qualitative datasets. Its emphasis on iterative coding and reflexive engagement makes it well-suited for studies grounded in interpretivist and phenomenological paradigms, where the goal is to produce deep, contextualised understandings of lived experience.

Thematic analysis was selected for several reasons. First, its emphasis on reflexivity and transparency aligns with the interpretivist commitment to meaning-making as a co-constructed activity. Second, its methodological structure supports an inductive analytic orientation, allowing themes to emerge from participants' narratives rather than being imposed through deductive coding. Finally, it accommodates heterogeneity of experience, enabling the representation of both shared patterns and idiosyncratic expressions across participant accounts.

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, the analysis progressed through six distinct yet recursive phases:

1. Familiarisation with the data – Reading and re-reading transcripts alongside re-listening to the audio recordings to ensure immersion in the data. Initial analytic notes were taken, with particular attention to tone, cadence, pauses, and emotional emphasis evident in the participants' speech.

2. Generating initial codes – Systematic identification of meaningful segments of text using descriptive and interpretive labels.
3. Searching for themes – Clustering related codes into broader thematic categories.
4. Reviewing themes – Refining, collapsing, or separating themes based on coherence and alignment with the research question.
5. Defining and naming themes – Elaborating thematic essence, boundaries, and relevance to theoretical constructs.
6. Producing the report – Constructing a narrative of findings, supported by thick description and illustrative quotes.

This process was not linear but recursive and iterative. Movement between phases was constant, with codes reinterpreted, themes redefined, and meanings renegotiated in light of deeper engagement with the data.

Coding Process and Rationale

This study employed a manual, digitally assisted approach to coding. This decision was intentional and epistemologically aligned with the study's phenomenological foundation. Manual coding fostered a more intimate, embodied relationship with the data—a form of methodological immersion that prioritised presence, attention, and interpretive care (Saldaña, 2021).

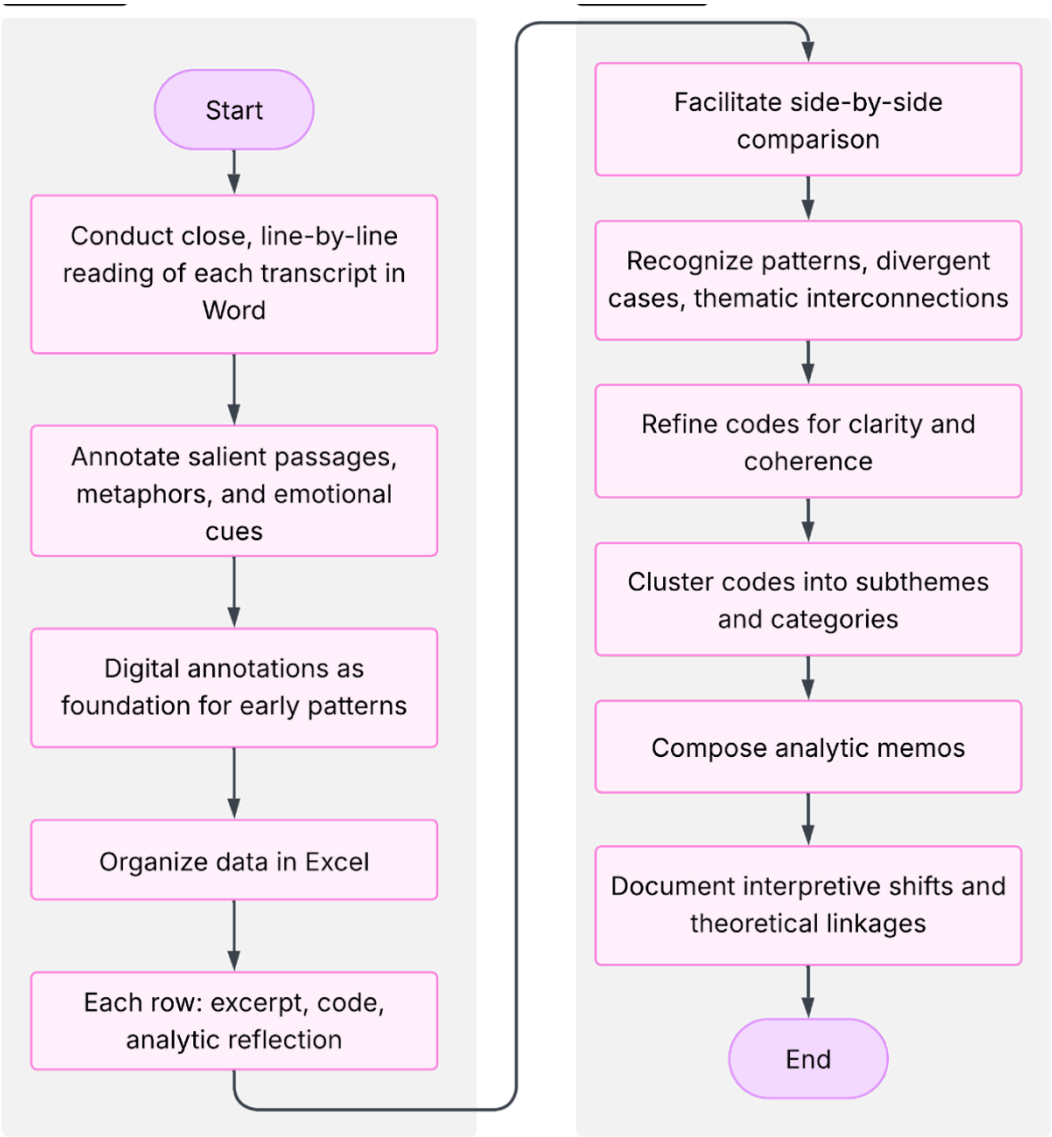
The initial stage of analysis involved conducting a close, line-by-line reading of each transcript in Microsoft Word. Using the comment and highlighting features, I annotated sections that reflected salient passages, recurring metaphors, emotional cues, and disruptions in narrative

flow. These digital annotations served as the foundation for identifying early interpretive patterns.

Subsequently, I organised the data in Microsoft Excel, where each row represented a discrete excerpt alongside its preliminary code and brief analytic reflection. The Excel matrix facilitated side-by-side comparison across participants, allowing for the recognition of recurring patterns, divergent cases, and thematic interconnections. Codes were then refined for semantic clarity and conceptual coherence, and inductively clustered into subthemes and overarching thematic categories. Analytic memos were composed throughout this process to document interpretive shifts and theoretical linkages, particularly in relation to Self-Determination Theory and Schlossberg's Transition Theory.

Figure 3

Coding workflow for thematic analysis.



Note. This process maintained a high level of researcher proximity to the data, while ensuring that emergent themes were robust, well-grounded, and sensitive to the complexities of transitional experience.

Sample Coding Table

The following table illustrates how data were interpreted and themed, demonstrating the link between raw participant language, analytic subthemes, and higher-order themes.

Table 2

Coding Matrix and Structure

Participant Quote	Initial Subtheme	Broader Theme
"It took me a while to figure out the lingo—things like 'SCORM' or 'learning objectives' weren't part of my vocabulary as a teacher." (EC)	Being able to translate ID lingo	Reframing Prior Teaching Experiences
"I just kept telling myself that I know how to adapt. I've taught every grade—you just find ways to adjust." (CH)	Maximizing adjustment strategies	
"One of the biggest reasons I made the jump was balance. I was burning out from evening marking and weekend planning." (JR)	Work-Life Balance	Anchoring to Personal Wellbeing
"I wanted to be more present for my kids. This new role lets me actually have dinner with them." (CB)	Family as a cornerstone	

"There were so many skills I brought over—curriculum design, pacing, even understanding learner needs." (BW)	Valuing transferable skills	Reconciling ID Role Expectations
"Instructional design allowed me to align with what I value—equity, learner agency, creativity—more than the school system did." (SD)	Expanding scope of personal values	
"You quickly realize relationships matter—PMs, SMEs, tech teams... it's all about collaboration." (KC)	Social capital as a metric for success	Cultivating Productive Relationships

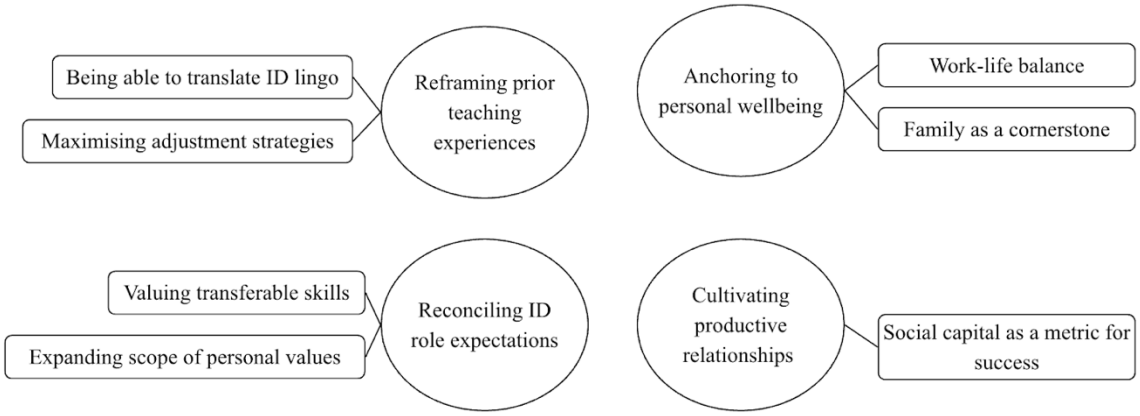
Each quote reflects not only the phenomenological depth of participants' accounts but also the conceptual traction of the analytic categories generated. The subthemes serve as interpretive bridges between participants' words and the study's broader theoretical and practical concerns.

Thematic Framework Visual Map

The following visual map presents the final thematic framework, with subthemes nested for each major theme. These themes provide the organising structure for the findings presented in Chapter Four.

Figure 4

Thematic framework visual map.



Conceptual Framework

This study was informed by two complementary theoretical frameworks—Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984)—which provided both interpretive scaffolding and analytic direction. Rather than being used prescriptively, these theories served as sensitising concepts (Blumer, 1969), shaping how participant narratives were interpreted, and allowing for the emergence of deeper meaning around motivation, identity negotiation, and adaptation during professional change.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

At its core, SDT asserts that humans are motivated to grow and develop when three basic psychological needs are satisfied: autonomy (the need to feel volitional in one's actions), competence (the need to feel effective and capable), and relatedness (the need to feel connected to others) (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). In the context of this study, SDT helps

illuminate the motivational undercurrents that guided participants' decisions to leave K–12 teaching and enter the field of instructional design.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984) offers a practical framework for understanding how individuals experience, interpret, and navigate major life transitions. It posits that an individual's ability to cope with transition depends on four key variables—collectively known as the 4 S's:

1. Situation – the context in which the transition occurs (voluntary/involuntary, expected/unexpected).
2. Self – personal and psychological characteristics (resilience, outlook, coping capacity).
3. Support – availability and quality of social support networks.
4. Strategies – coping responses used to manage the transition (problem-focused, emotion-focused, etc.).

This framework was instrumental in interpreting how participants adjusted to their new professional realities. For instance, while most transitions were described as voluntary, they were also framed as emotionally fraught, involving tensions around loss of identity, uncertainty, or perceived failure.

Participants' "Self" characteristics (e.g., resilience, self-directed learning, value-orientation) were often cited as reasons they adapted effectively, while support networks—particularly peer communities, mentors, and family—served as buffers during the uncertainty of transition. Importantly, the strategies employed varied widely: some participants pursued

certifications or micro credentials, others leveraged informal communities of practice, while several adopted trial-and-error approaches grounded in reflective praxis.

Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT)

Career-shift among K-12 teachers into industrial design can also be best explained by dividing dissecting their motivations into two essential questions: (1) “Can I do this?” and (2) “Do I want to do this?”. An important dimension in career shift is the recognition of ones’ present skillset that could be useful in their new career. The job expectancies required in the new role are within their capabilities. For instance, K-12 teachers transitioning to instructional design may find “creation of visual aid” as a useful skill to apply in their new roles.

However, transition to a new role can also be seen in the metaphysical values they uphold such as advocacies, dreams, and aspirations. Applying this in the context of career shift, some K-12 teachers know that their current skillset is not within the expectations set for the job, however, their personal dreams of teaching fill in the gap between their capabilities and the job description.

Ethical Considerations

This study was granted ethical clearance by the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) under protocol number #24-0539. All components of the research were conducted in strict accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2, 2022), which articulates the core ethical principles of respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice. These principles informed the planning, recruitment, data collection, analysis, and dissemination of this study to safeguard the rights and well-being of all participants involved.

Additionally, Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) was utilized in some sections of the study. Generative AI was performed in the following:

1. Improvement of textual deliveries and reorganization of ideas for smooth flow of discussions.

2. Checking of available online resources for theoretical and literature grounding.

Informed Consent and Ongoing Consent

Informed consent was obtained through a carefully structured, multi-stage process consistent with Articles 3.1 to 3.3 of the TCPS2. After completing an eligibility screening via Microsoft Forms, participants were emailed a comprehensive consent form that described the study's purpose, data collection procedures, anticipated risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and the right to withdraw. Participants were encouraged to ask questions before signing and returning the form. Only after receiving signed consent were interviews scheduled.

Although written consent had already been obtained, verbal consent was also reaffirmed at the beginning of each interview as a procedural and ethical safeguard. This reaffirmation served as a gesture of ongoing respect and ensured that participants were comfortable continuing, thereby reflecting the TCPS2's position that consent is not a one-time event but an ongoing process throughout the research relationship.

Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw

Participation in this study was voluntary. Participants were explicitly informed that they had the right to withdraw at any point without penalty or a need to provide justification. This information was conveyed in the consent form, reiterated during the recruitment process, and

emphasized again at the start of each interview. If a participant had chosen to withdraw prior to or during the interview, no data would have been retained. If a participant withdrew after the interview but before data analysis commenced, all associated data would have been securely deleted, as outlined in the approved research protocol. In practice, no participants withdrew from the study, and all provided their full consent to the inclusion of their data in the analysis.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

While full anonymity could not be achieved during the data collection phase due to the nature of qualitative interviews, participant confidentiality was rigorously protected throughout the research process. To protect identities, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. These pseudonyms were used consistently across all transcripts, data analysis, and reporting. Any potentially identifying contextual details—such as school names, specific job titles, or unique geographic references—were removed or modified during transcription to prevent indirect identification.

A separate encrypted document linking real participant identities to pseudonyms was created and stored securely. This file was maintained on a password-protected laptop stored at the researcher's private residence. Only the researcher had access to this file. All transcripts and audio recordings were similarly stored on encrypted devices, with no data stored on cloud-based platforms. These measures ensured compliance with institutional policy and mitigated any exposure risks associated with third-party or international data servers, such as the U.S. Freedom Act.

Confidentiality protocols also extended to research dissemination. In any thesis, conference presentation, or publication, data were reported in fully de-identified form, and

illustrative quotations were selected and edited to ensure participants could not be recognized either directly or indirectly.

Data Storage and Security

Data management and storage practices were informed by University of Victoria policy and national ethical guidelines. All electronic files—including audio recordings, transcripts, consent forms, and research memos—were stored on a password-protected personal laptop and backed up to an encrypted external hard drive. Both devices were kept at the researcher's private residence, and no data were uploaded to cloud-based services.

Access to the data was restricted solely to the researcher, and if required, to the academic supervisor. In accordance with UVic research data retention policy, all data will be stored securely for five years following the completion of the study. After this period, all files will be permanently deleted using secure deletion software to prevent data recovery or unauthorized access.

Member Checking and Participant Agency

To support the credibility and trustworthiness of the data, as well as to honour participants' agency and voice, member checking was employed. After each interview was transcribed and de-identified, participants were invited to review their transcript for accuracy. This process gave participants the opportunity to correct or clarify their statements and ensured that their perspectives were faithfully represented.

Several participants provided confirmations without changes, while others made minor corrections that were incorporated into the final dataset. This procedure not only supported

ethical best practices in qualitative research but also reaffirmed participants' ownership over their narratives.

Assessment of Risk and Mitigation

This study was classified as minimal risk research, consistent with Article 6.12 of the TCPS2. Participants were engaged in reflective dialogue regarding their past experiences transitioning from K–12 teaching into instructional design roles. These discussions were grounded in professional reflection and did not involve sensitive personal or psychological content that would reasonably be expected to cause harm or discomfort.

Nonetheless, the study incorporated mechanisms to minimize any potential risk. The semi-structured interview protocol was designed to allow participants flexibility in their responses, and they were reminded at multiple points that they could decline to answer any question or stop the interview entirely. I was also prepared to pause or terminate the interview in response to signs of emotional distress and to offer referrals to appropriate support services if needed. However, no adverse reactions occurred during the interviews.

The interview environment was virtual, allowing participants to engage from the comfort of their own homes or private spaces. Interviews were scheduled at mutually convenient times, further minimizing disruption or inconvenience.

Ethical Compliance Summary

Every aspect of this research was guided by a strong ethical framework rooted in national guidelines and institutional requirements. Informed consent, confidentiality, data security, and participant welfare were prioritized at each stage of the research process. Through careful

planning and proactive ethical practices, the study upheld the dignity, autonomy, and safety of all participants while ensuring the integrity and credibility of the research findings.

Trustworthiness and Rigour

This study draws upon Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for establishing qualitative trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Each criterion was addressed through specific strategies designed to strengthen the analytical and ethical integrity of the research.

Credibility

To support credibility, the researcher engaged in prolonged interaction with the data through multiple re-readings of transcripts, detailed field journaling, and reflexive memoing. The interview protocol was peer-reviewed by supervisors for clarity and alignment with research aims. Additionally, member checking ensured that participant meanings were accurately captured and respected.

Dependability

An audit trail of analytic decisions, including evolving codebooks, thematic tables, and memos, was maintained throughout the process. Coding was reviewed iteratively to trace how themes evolved from raw data. While manual coding was used instead of a qualitative analysis software, the researcher adopted a structured, transparent system of data management using Excel, Word, and memo documentation.

Confirmability

The use of direct participant quotations, detailed documentation of analytic choices, and regular engagement with supervisors helped ensure that findings emerged from the data rather than researcher bias. A reflexive field journal captured the researcher's evolving positionalities, emotional responses, and interpretive dilemmas, providing another layer of confirmability.

Transferability

Although this study is not designed for generalisability, it offers a thick, context-rich description of participants' settings, experiences, and trajectories. By offering detailed thematic narratives in Chapter Four, the reader is empowered to assess transferability to other contexts, such as transitions in adjacent professions (e.g., academia, educational technology, or corporate learning).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed methodological foundations and analytic procedures of the study, guided by a phenomenological framework and anchored in interpretivist epistemology. From purposive recruitment and semi-structured interviews to a multi-phased thematic analysis, every methodological decision was made with a view toward capturing the lived, meaning-laden nature of career transition.

The study draws upon Self-Determination Theory and Schlossberg's Transition Theory to illuminate participants' experiences of motivation, adaptation, and reorientation. Through ethical diligence, reflexivity, and methodical transparency, the study strives to offer trustworthy insights

into the personal and professional realignments that occur when K–12 teachers transition into instructional design roles.

The next chapter presents the findings of the study, organised around the four emergent themes and corresponding subthemes.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study, drawing on semi-structured interviews with eight participants who transitioned from K–12 teaching into instructional design. The purpose of this chapter is to present participants' accounts of their transition experiences – organized thematically and interpreted through the lenses of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Schlossberg's Transition Theory. The findings focus on how participants made sense of their prior teaching experiences, reconciled expectations associated with instructional design work, anchored their decisions in personal well-being, and cultivated productive professional relationships during and after their transition.

Participants in this study represented a range of teaching backgrounds, career stages, and employment circumstances at the time of transition. Collectively, they brought between 3 and 18 years of teaching experience, taught across elementary, middle, and secondary grade levels, and transitioned into instructional design through varied pathways, including professional development roles, secondments, contract work, and full-time instructional design positions. Of the eight participants, five transitioned into instructional design roles within higher education institutions (e.g., universities, and colleges), while three moved into corporate learning and development environments within for-profit organizations. This sectoral distribution enabled comparison of how institutional context shaped participants' experiences of autonomy, role clarity, career progression, and professional identity. The diversity across sectors allowed for exploration of both common transition patterns and context-specific nuances in how instructional design roles were experienced and navigated.

Participant Profiles

Participant BW had three years of teaching experience and taught grades 8–12. At the time of transition, BW moved from a teaching role into a full-time position in professional development, and subsequently into a full-time role in curriculum design and instructional design. BW's experience reflects an early-career transition characterised by movement through adjacent educational roles before fully entering instructional design.

Participant CB had 18 years of teaching experience and taught grades 7–12. At the time of transition, CB was employed under a temporary teaching contract. CB's transition occurred after a lengthy teaching career and was shaped by considerations related to professional sustainability, assessment expertise, and long-term career viability.

Participant CH had approximately 12.5 years of teaching experience and taught grades 3–4. CH worked as a release teacher and held a permanent teaching contract, having been employed on a permanent basis since graduating from teacher education. CH's transition reflects a mid-career shift influenced by both professional identity considerations and personal circumstances.

Participant EC had 12 years of teaching experience and taught grades 9–12. Between years nine and ten of teaching, EC took a half-year educational leave followed by a one-and-a-half-year secondment to a K–12 coding and robotics education program. At the time of leaving teaching, EC had held a permanent contract for approximately 11 years. EC's pathway illustrates a gradual transition facilitated through exploratory roles and temporary reassignments.

Participant JR had approximately 3.5 years of teaching experience and taught across grades 3–7 and 8–12. At the time of transition, JR was working casually as a graduate student

and substitute teacher. JR's experience represents a transition occurring alongside graduate studies and contingent employment.

Participant KC had three years of teaching experience and taught grades 9–12. KC was employed under a temporary teaching contract at the time of transition. KC's pathway reflects an early-career transition shaped by contract precarity and emerging professional identity.

Participant KW had four years of teaching experience and taught grades 3–5. At the time of transition, KW was working as a substitute teacher, and their temporary contract had recently ended. KW's experience highlights the role of employment instability in shaping readiness for career change.

Participant SD had 16 years of teaching experience and taught grades 8–12. At the time of transition, SD was unemployed, having resigned from a permanent teaching position in order to relocate to another city. Following relocation, SD began working as a full-time instructional designer. SD's transition reflects a late-career shift influenced by geographic mobility and work–life considerations.

Taken together, these participant profiles demonstrate that transitions into instructional design occurred across varied career stages and employment contexts. This diversity provides an important backdrop for interpreting the themes presented in this chapter, as participants' experiences were shaped not only by individual motivations, but also by structural factors such as contract status, career longevity, and access to transitional opportunities.

Theme 1: Reframing Prior Teaching Experiences

Participants described the transition from K–12 teaching to ID as a process that required a fundamental reframing of their prior professional experiences. Rather than discarding teaching knowledge as irrelevant or insufficient, participants gradually came to reinterpret their teaching practice as a legitimate and robust foundation for instructional design work. This reframing was not immediate, it unfolded through encounters with unfamiliar terminology, professional expectations, and assumptions about what constituted "real" instructional design expertise.

Across accounts, participants articulated how teaching and instructional design were initially positioned as distinct or even incompatible professions. Over time, however, participants actively worked to reconcile this perceived divide by translating instructional design language into familiar pedagogical practices and by developing strategies that allowed them to adjust without abandoning their professional identities. Through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this reframing process was closely tied to restoring a sense of competence. Through Schlossberg's transition framework, it reflects the interplay between the self and the strategies participants employed to navigate professional change. This theme is organised into two subthemes: (1) being able to translate ID lingo, and (2) maximising adjustment strategies.

1.1: Being Able to Translate ID Lingo

Participants consistently identified instructional design language as one of the first and most visible barriers encountered during their transition. Terms such as project management, learning needs analysis, backwards design, and assessment strategy initially appeared to signal specialised expertise that teachers did not possess. This linguistic divide contributed to feelings

of inadequacy and uncertainty, particularly during early job applications and professional interactions.

Participant CH articulated how dominant narratives about teaching experience shaped these early perceptions. They described repeatedly encountering the idea that teaching—especially teaching children—did not translate to instructional design work, stating that "the experience with children doesn't translate to working in a commercial instructional design or an academic instructional design environment." Over time, this message became internalised, leading CH to reflect that "being that I had never been an instructional designer at that point, I was really influenced by that opinion… it became a real insecurity for me." From an SDT perspective, this moment represents a threat to perceived competence. When professional language obscured continuity between teaching and instructional design, participants' confidence in their own abilities was destabilised.

However, once participants gained exposure to instructional design practice, many began to critically reassess this perceived divide. CH's perspective shifted significantly after working in both contexts, leading them to assert, "But now that I have done both things, there is really no difference. Teaching kids and teaching grownups is the same." Rather than positioning ID as fundamentally different, CH reframed it as pedagogical work occurring in a different context. Importantly, CH clarified that "the real big difference has nothing to do with learning. It's all about motivation," locating the distinction not in instructional mechanics but in how learner engagement is cultivated.

Other participants echoed this realisation, particularly around instructional planning and design processes. Participant EC described how teachers were already engaging in instructional

design practices, even if they did not use formal ID terminology. As EC explained, “a lot of like jargons and language may not be familiar, but they’re actually doing it, but they actually know it at the back of their heads.” This observation highlights how language, rather than practice, initially created a sense of distance between teaching and instructional design.

Participant SD reinforced this point by explicitly linking instructional design terminology to familiar teaching work. Reflecting on discussions within their professional group, SD noted, “My group has also been talking a lot about project management the last couple years as well. And like recognizing that, yeah, what we’re doing does that.” SD further elaborated by explaining how project management mapped directly onto classroom planning: “How we time assessments versus overlap with new instruction versus assessments. All that backwards design.” These comments demonstrate how translating ID language into pedagogical logic allowed participants to reclaim competence and legitimacy.

Participant BW similarly reframed teaching as inherently design-oriented, stating, “I think teachers underestimate how much design work they already do.” BW made this connection explicit by asserting, “Lesson planning, scaffolding, differentiation — that’s instructional design.” This reframing positioned teaching not as a precursor to instructional design, but as an existing form of it.

Collectively, these accounts illustrate how translating ID lingo functioned as both a cognitive and identity-based strategy. Once participants could recognise familiar practices beneath unfamiliar language, instructional design became intelligible rather than intimidating. Through Schlossberg’s framework, this translation represents an adaptive strategy that allowed

participants to integrate past experiences into new professional contexts rather than discarding them.

1.2: Maximising Adjustment Strategies

Beyond translating professional language and renegotiating professional identity, participants described their deliberate strategies to actively manage their transition into instructional design. These strategies were behavioural, relational, and cognitive in nature. Rather than portraying transition as passive adaptation, participants articulated intentional efforts to strengthen competence, seek informational support, and recalibrate their understanding of their own capabilities. These patterns align with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Schlossberg's transition framework, and Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT), particularly in relation to how expectancy beliefs and perceived task value shaped sustained engagement during adjustment.

Participant JR described actively constructing professional networks to build competence and reduce isolation. Rather than remaining confined within their immediate departmental context, JR explained, "I would kind of like, call them up and be like, hey, can we go for coffee? I'd like to learn more. Or like, I just want to bounce some ideas off of, you know, that kind of thing." This intentional outreach positioned learning as relational and dialogic. JR also described leveraging online professional spaces, noting, "Some of the peer networking through Twitter actually was pretty helpful in terms of, like, problem solving or just getting ideas." Engagement in Twitter-based peer networks functioned as an informal professional learning environment, allowing JR to crowdsource solutions and observe how others approached similar challenges. From an EVT perspective, such exposure likely strengthened expectancy beliefs by increasing

familiarity with the discourse and practices of instructional design. Seeing others navigate similar problems may have normalised uncertainty while reinforcing the perception that challenges were solvable. From an SDT standpoint, these behaviours supported both competence and relatedness, embedding JR within a broader professional community.

Similarly, Participant KC described a highly self-directed, problem-driven approach to skill acquisition. KC emphasised that much of their learning did not come from formal coursework but from observing practitioners and experimenting independently. As KC explained, “Honestly, I would say like the, the biggest learning that I, that I've received was like following certain people on LinkedIn, for instance, and looking at their projects and looking at their step-by-step stuff.” KC further elaborated, “I feel like that's where a lot of my education is. It's just the hands on, getting kind of into the tool or whatever it might be. And then if I can't find it, go to YouTube ChatGPT, like, hey, can you explain this or can you write me a code or can you. This is happening, right? So, like, I feel like I kind of, I go to whatever I'm missing in terms of skill or knowledge, I go and I kind of fish out the piece of it.” This description illustrates a strategic pattern of identifying specific knowledge gaps and seeking targeted, just-in-time solutions through online platforms. Rather than perceiving skill deficits as barriers, KC treated them as solvable problems. From an EVT lens, each successfully resolved issue likely reinforced expectancy beliefs by providing immediate mastery experiences. At the same time, the willingness to invest effort in acquiring new skills reflects perceived utility and attainment value attached to instructional design competence.

Participant CH similarly referenced online resources as part of navigating technical demands, noting, “YouTube is a great resource for heroes specific to Storyline.” Although brief, this statement positions YouTube as a concrete technical support mechanism within instructional

design practice. More significantly, CH's account illustrates the cognitive dimension of adjustment strategies. After attending a professional development session where a speaker asserted that teachers would make "horrible instructional designers," CH reflected that insecurity "probably ended up projecting some of that in my interviews." This moment demonstrates how lowered expectancy beliefs can shape behaviour during transition. However, following practical experience in instructional design, CH later reframed this narrative, stating, "there is really no difference. Teaching kids and teaching grownups is the same. Your brain works the same." Through this reinterpretation, CH repositioned prior teaching expertise as transferable rather than deficient. From an EVT perspective, this represents a recalibration of expectancy beliefs upward; experience replaced doubt with evidence of capability. From an SDT perspective, this shift strengthened perceived competence and autonomy by allowing CH to define their professional identity on their own terms rather than through external deficit narratives.

Participant EC described a sustained pattern of creating and sharing instructional materials that functioned as informal preparation for instructional design. EC stated, "I just build and I share. I build and I share. I don't care what happens to it. Change it if you want to kind of a thing." This iterative process of building and distributing learning resources reflects ongoing engagement in design practice, even prior to formally transitioning roles. Repeated artefact creation likely generated mastery experiences that strengthened confidence in design capabilities. In EVT terms, such experiences reinforce expectancy for success, while the intrinsic satisfaction of building resources suggests attainment value tied to being someone who creates effective learning experiences.

Structured investment in formal skill development also emerged as an adjustment strategy. Participant CB described completing a master's certificate in instructional design while

teaching full-time, explaining that courses “were all done in the evenings or weekends” and that they “tried to leave time in the summer so I wouldn't have to be tied to the courses.” This deliberate time management reflects intentional professional positioning rather than incidental upskilling. Sustained coursework alongside full-time employment indicates high perceived utility value, as CB viewed the credential as instrumental for future mobility. At the same time, formal coursework likely strengthened expectancy beliefs by providing theoretical grounding and validation of instructional design knowledge.

Across these accounts, maximising adjustment strategies included relational networking, participation in online professional communities, just-in-time technical learning through platforms such as YouTube, iterative artefact production, formal credential completion, and cognitive reframing of deficit narratives. These actions reflect active mobilisation of Schlossberg’s “strategies” and “support” resources during transition. From an SDT perspective, participants supported autonomy through self-directed learning, competence through mastery experiences, and relatedness through professional networks. EVT provides additional explanatory depth: participants sustained effort when they believed success was attainable and when instructional design held sufficient value—whether in terms of professional growth, identity alignment, intellectual engagement, or mobility—to justify the cost of transition.

From an Expectancy-Value Theory perspective, these adjustment strategies can be interpreted as mechanisms that strengthened expectancy beliefs through repeated mastery experiences (e.g., resolving technical problems, producing artefacts, completing credentials) and sustained engagement through enhanced perceptions of utility and attainment value associated with instructional design work. At the same time, participants’ decisions to persist—despite steep

learning curves—suggest that perceived costs (time, uncertainty, emotional strain) were judged as manageable relative to anticipated returns.

Maximising adjustment, therefore, was not merely reactive coping but an intentional, expectancy-informed investment in professional repositioning. Participants strategically leveraged prior expertise, sought targeted knowledge when gaps emerged, accumulated evidence of competence through practice, and recalibrated their own narratives in ways that supported successful transition into instructional design.

Summary of Theme 1

Taken together, Theme 1 illustrates that transitioning from K–12 teaching to instructional design was not a process of abandoning prior expertise but of actively reframing and reinterpreting it. Participants initially encountered instructional design as linguistically and culturally distinct, often experiencing threats to competence when unfamiliar terminology and dominant narratives positioned teaching as insufficient preparation. However, through translating instructional design language into familiar pedagogical practices and enacting deliberate adjustment strategies—such as networking, self-directed learning, online problem-solving, artefact creation, and formal credentialing—participants reconstructed coherence between past and present professional identities. From a Self-Determination Theory perspective, this reframing restored perceptions of competence and autonomy. Schlossberg's framework highlights how participants mobilised strategies and supports to navigate situational demands, while Expectancy-Value Theory clarifies why sustained effort occurred: participants persisted when they came to believe that success in instructional design was attainable and that the role held sufficient personal and professional value. Ultimately, reframing prior teaching experience

was not merely cognitive reinterpretation; it was an active, expectancy-informed process through which participants integrated, rather than erased, their professional histories.

Theme 2: Reconciling Instructional Design Expectations

Participants' transitions into instructional design were characterised by an ongoing process of reconciling what they initially expected instructional design work to involve with what the role demanded in practice. These expectations were shaped by prior experiences in teaching, dominant narratives about instructional design as a specialised or technical profession, and assumptions about what constituted legitimacy and success in new professional contexts. As participants gained experience, they began to reassess these expectations by recognising the value of their transferable skills and by expanding the scope of the personal values guiding their career decisions.

Through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this reconciliation process was closely tied to restoring and sustaining competence and autonomy. Participants' ability to recognise what they already knew—and to choose roles aligned with evolving priorities—supported more self-endorsed motivation. From the perspective of Schlossberg's transition framework, reconciling expectations reflects shifts in how participants understood their situation and self, allowing them to integrate instructional design work into a coherent professional identity. This theme is explored through two subthemes: (1) valuing transferable skills, and (2) expanding the scope of personal values.

2.1: Valuing Transferable Skills

Participants often began their transition into instructional design believing that the role required a complete departure from their existing skills. This assumption shifted over time as

they recognized that many competencies necessary for instructional design were already inherent in their teaching practice. Reconciling their expectations of the field ultimately hinged on this growing awareness of the expertise they already possessed.

Participant CH explicitly challenged the assumption that instructional design demanded a fundamentally different cognitive orientation than teaching, stating, “Teaching kids and teaching grownups is the same. Your brain works the same.” This reframing positioned learning as a continuous process across contexts rather than as something age-dependent. By asserting this continuity, CH rejected the notion that instructional design represented a break from pedagogical expertise.

CH further emphasised that “the fundamentals of the job are easily supported with teaching skills,” highlighting how core instructional design tasks—such as understanding learners, structuring content, and facilitating engagement—were already familiar. This recognition was critical for reconciling early expectations that instructional design would require abandoning prior expertise. From an SDT perspective, identifying this continuity supported competence by allowing participants to view themselves as capable contributors rather than novices.

Participant EC echoed this recognition through their discussion of instructional planning frameworks. EC described how instructional design emphasised “backwards design… what are your learning activities, what are the things that will address or how are you going to assess these learning outcomes.” While framed as a formal design model in instructional design contexts, EC recognised this approach as consistent with planning strategies long used in classrooms. This

realization allowed EC to reinterpret instructional design expectations as structured articulations of familiar pedagogical logic rather than entirely new practices.

Similarly, EC reflected on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), noting, “UDL… that’s just something that I think I was naturally doing a lot in my instruction.” This comment underscores how inclusive design principles, often presented as specialised expertise in instructional design discourse, were already part of participants’ teaching practice. Recognising this alignment reduced the perceived gap between teaching and instructional design expectations.

Additional participants reinforced this perspective by explicitly naming teaching practices as instructional design work. Participant BW observed, “I think teachers underestimate how much design work they already do,” and went on to state, “Lesson planning, scaffolding, differentiation — that’s instructional design.” BW’s comments challenge deficit-oriented narratives about teaching backgrounds and reposition teachers as experienced designers whose work has simply been labelled differently.

Participant CB further highlighted how teaching experience could exceed expectations in instructional design contexts. CB noted, “There are definitely areas where I felt like I had more expertise than my colleagues, particularly in areas of assessment.” This statement reflects how reconciling expectations involved recognising not only equivalence, but at times advantage. Assessment design—an area central to teaching—became a domain where CB could contribute confidently and assert professional value.

Collectively, these accounts illustrate that valuing transferable skills was not an abstract exercise, it was a practical and identity-shaping process. By recognising the depth of their existing expertise, participants were able to align instructional design expectations with their

professional histories. Through Schlossberg's framework, this process reflects a recalibration of the self, where participants reconstructed their professional identities in ways that affirmed continuity rather than rupture. EVT offers complementary explanatory depth here. As participants recognised that they already possessed relevant design competencies, their expectancy for success in instructional design increased, while the work also gained attainment value because it aligned with how they understood themselves: as professionals capable of designing learning effectively. In this sense, "transferable skills" were not only functional assets but also identity-confirming resources that strengthened both confidence and commitment.

2.2: Expanding the Scope of Personal Values

Beyond skill recognition, participants described reconciling instructional design expectations by expanding the scope of personal values informing their career decisions. For many, the transition was not motivated solely by dissatisfaction with teaching tasks, but by broader considerations related to mental health, sustainability, and alignment with life circumstances. Instructional design roles were evaluated not only for technical fit, but for how well they supported participants' evolving priorities.

Participant CB articulated this process of reflection by stating, "At some point, I had to ask myself if staying was actually helping my mental health." This question reframed the decision to transition as an act of self-assessment rather than avoidance. Rather than viewing departure from teaching as failure, CB positioned it as a rational response to misalignment between professional demands and personal well-being. From an EVT perspective, this reflection can be interpreted as a reassessment of cost. Participants did not describe leaving teaching solely because instructional design held greater appeal; they also described the

escalating emotional, cognitive, and relational costs of remaining in K–12 contexts. As costs rose (e.g., stress, safety concerns, depletion), instructional design became more attractive not only for its benefits, but because it appeared to reduce the ongoing "price" of working.

Participant CB further explained that they were seeking something "that would be sustainable long-term." This emphasis on sustainability reflects a shift in how success was defined. Rather than prioritising endurance within a demanding system, participants began to value roles that allowed for ongoing engagement without chronic depletion. From an SDT perspective, this reflects the exercise of autonomy—choosing work that aligns with internal values rather than external expectations.

Participant CH's narrative similarly illustrates how personal values shaped the reconciliation of expectations. CH described a confluence of personal and professional challenges that prompted reassessment, explaining that a difficult period "just kind of made me want to be closer to my family." This statement highlights how relational priorities influenced how instructional design roles were perceived. Expectations about work were filtered through considerations of proximity, safety, and emotional support.

CH also referenced workplace experiences that contributed to this reassessment, noting "some violence in my classroom where I wasn't being supported." This lack of institutional support became a critical factor in evaluating whether teaching environments aligned with personal values. Instructional design roles, by contrast, were interpreted as offering greater stability and protection, making them more compatible with participants' needs during periods of vulnerability.

Using Schlossberg's framework, these narratives reveal how the situation, as defined by external events, stressors, and contextual constraints, intersected with the participants' evolving identities. Their transition to instructional design was not merely a reaction to change, but a proactive alignment with their shifting professional selves and emerging needs.

Expanding the scope of personal values also allowed participants to integrate teaching's relational and ethical commitments into new contexts. Instructional design was not framed as abandoning care for learners, but as relocating that care within environments perceived as more sustainable. Such reframing enabled participants to reconcile expectations about instructional design work with deeply held values around care, responsibility, and meaningful contribution.

Summary of Theme 2

Theme 2 illustrates that reconciling expectations in instructional design requires both the recognition of transferable skills and an expansion of the personal values guiding career choices. Initially, participants faced uncertainty as they navigated unfamiliar roles and professional narratives that undervalued their prior teaching experience. However, they eventually reframed instructional design as a domain where their pedagogical expertise remained relevant and where personal priorities—such as mental health, sustainability, and family—could be honoured.

Anchored in Self-Determination Theory, this theme highlights how competence and autonomy were restored through skill recognition and self-endorsed decision-making. Through Schlossberg's transition framework, it demonstrated how participants' interpretations of their situation and sense of self evolved to support successful adjustment. Together, these findings

suggest that reconciling instructional design expectations is less about conforming to an external professional ideal and more about aligning work with accumulated expertise and evolving personal values.

Theme 3: Anchoring to Personal Well-Being

Across participants' narratives, personal well-being emerged as a central anchor shaping both the decision to transition from teaching into instructional design and the capacity to remain engaged once the transition had occurred. Well-being was not framed as a peripheral benefit or an incidental outcome of career change. Instead, participants described it as a foundational condition that influenced how they evaluated work environments, professional expectations, and long-term sustainability.

From a theoretical standpoint, this theme reflects a convergence between autonomy and relatedness within Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the situation and support components of Schlossberg's transition framework. Participants' accounts suggest that teaching contexts increasingly constrained their ability to meet personal, relational, and emotional needs, while instructional design roles offered structural conditions that made well-being more attainable. This theme is expressed through two subthemes: (1) work–life balance, and (2) family as cornerstone.

3.1: Work–Life Balance

Participants consistently framed work–life balance as a key motivator for leaving teaching and as an essential criterion for evaluating instructional design roles. Importantly, balance was not equated with reduced effort or disengagement. Rather, it was described as the

ability to invest sustained cognitive and emotional energy into work without experiencing chronic depletion.

Participant SD articulated the intensity of teaching work by describing it as layered labour, stating, “Teaching is like having a night job on top of your day job.” This metaphor captures how teaching responsibilities extended beyond formal work hours, requiring ongoing planning, grading, and emotional labour outside the school day. SD contrasted this experience with instructional design work, noting, “With instructional design, you do that work during the day.” This comparison highlights how instructional design was perceived as offering clearer boundaries around when work occurred, even when the work itself remained demanding.

From an SDT perspective, this shift reflects increased autonomy—not necessarily in workload reduction, but in control over time and energy. Participants described instructional design roles as allowing them to engage fully during designated work hours without the expectation of constant after-hours labour. This structural difference played a significant role in restoring a sense of balance. Interpreted through EVT, participants’ emphasis on clearer boundaries and predictability suggests that instructional design increased utility value (work that “fits” life demands) while decreasing perceived cost (after-hours labour, constant availability, and the emotional toll of chronic workload spillover). These cost–value recalibrations help explain why participants framed the transition as a sustainability decision rather than a simple preference shift.

Participant CB similarly described instructional design as offering flexibility that supported well-being. CB noted, “I could choose how many hours I was working,” emphasising the role of agency in shaping work commitments. This choice enabled CB to manage workload

in ways that aligned with personal capacity rather than institutional expectations. CB further explained that this flexibility allowed everyday life responsibilities to coexist with professional demands: “If I needed to pick up my kids or run errands, I could do that and still get my work done.”

These accounts illustrate that work–life balance was not solely about time management; it was about predictability, control, and integration. Participants valued the ability to respond to personal needs without professional penalty, which reduced stress and enhanced their capacity to remain engaged with their work. Through Schlossberg’s framework, such flexibility can be understood as a situational shift that reduced transition strain and supported ongoing adjustment.

Participant CH’s brief statement—“I jumped on it”—captures the urgency with which some participants responded to instructional design opportunities when they perceived alignment with well-being needs. While concise, this statement reflects a moment where accumulated strain in teaching contexts made alternative roles immediately attractive. The decision to transition was not impulsive, but rather the result of prolonged misalignment between work demands and personal sustainability.

Reflecting on experiences in the K-12 classroom, participant EC’s comment, “Don’t ask me repetitive low level kinds of questions,” emerged during a discussion of his classroom teaching practice and reflects his preference for intellectually engaging work . He later described the problems he was solving in teaching as “logistic problems” that were “not interesting,” noting that “there was no novelty in that” and that he felt “bored and… checked out” . In contrast, he described instructional design as energizing because “every time I build a new course I learn new things”. Together, these statements suggest that tasks perceived as cognitively

shallow or repetitive were draining, whereas instructional design provided opportunities for creative, intellectually engaging work.

Taken together, these narratives suggest that participants conceptualised work–life balance as a condition for sustained professional functioning. Instructional design roles were not inherently easier, but they were perceived as more compatible with participants' needs for autonomy, cognitive engagement, and recovery.

3.2: Family as Cornerstone

Family served as a central reference point in participants' accounts of well-being, acting as both a primary catalyst for their transition and a critical lens for evaluating instructional design roles. Rather than framing family as an external factor to be managed alongside professional life, participants viewed it as an integral component of how they defined success, sustainability, and personal fulfillment.

Participant SD explicitly linked their experience of teaching to challenges associated with family life, stating, "We've had two young children and teaching is not very flexible." SD further elaborated on this inflexibility by noting, "If a kid is sick, you still have to go in." These statements highlight how teaching structures limited participants' ability to respond to family needs, creating ongoing tension between professional and relational responsibilities. EVT further clarifies how family considerations shaped decision-making. Participants' accounts suggest that the costs of teaching were not experienced only as individual strain; they were relational costs as well—reduced flexibility, competing obligations, and diminished capacity to respond to family needs without penalty. Instructional design roles were perceived as higher in utility value

because they better supported participants' ability to meet both professional responsibilities and family commitments.

Participant CH's narrative further underscores the role of family as an anchoring force during transition. CH described how personal and professional challenges converged to prompt reassessment, stating that a difficult period "just kind of made me want to be closer to my family." This desire for proximity reflects how relational support became increasingly salient during times of vulnerability. Through Schlossberg's framework, family functioned as a critical source of support that influenced readiness for transition and shaped post-transition adjustment.

As mentioned in Section 2.2, family considerations also intersected with emotional safety and institutional support. CH referenced "some violence in my classroom where I wasn't being supported," indicating how unsafe or unsupportive work environments intensified the importance of family as a stabilising presence. Instructional design roles were thus evaluated not only for flexibility, but for their capacity to reduce exposure to emotionally taxing or unsafe conditions.

From an SDT perspective, the family as a cornerstone reflects the vital importance of relatedness in sustaining long-term motivation and well-being. Participants' engagement in instructional design was bolstered when their roles permitted them to fulfill relational obligations and maintain close personal ties without systemic conflict. Ultimately, career success was reframed: it was no longer defined solely by upward professional advancement, but by the capacity for relational presence and emotional availability.

Summary of Theme 3

Across both subthemes, participants framed well-being as a dynamic process rather than a static one. Instructional design roles were not inherently protective, but they offered greater

potential for well-being when participants could exercise agency, align work with values, and maintain relational connections.

As viewed using Self-Determination Theory (SDT), participants' narratives demonstrate how increased autonomy and relatedness provided the psychological scaffolding for sustained motivation. When analyzed via Schlossberg's framework, well-being emerges as a dual force: it acts as a catalyst for transition (born from the situational strain of teaching) and a stabilizer during the adjustment phase (reinforced by supportive family dynamics and flexible work structures). Together, these frameworks reveal that the transition to instructional design was not just a career change, but a strategic pursuit of a more sustainable and self-congruent life.

Crucially, participants did not describe prioritising well-being as a withdrawal from professional commitment. Instead, it was framed as a means of preserving the capacity to contribute meaningfully over time. Instructional design roles were valued because they enabled participants to remain engaged without sacrificing personal health or relational integrity.

Theme 3 identifies personal well-being as the central anchor in the transition from teaching to instructional design. By prioritizing work–life balance and recognizing "family as a cornerstone," participants described how instructional design provided the structural conditions necessary for autonomy, relational presence, and cognitive sustainability. Conversely, participants often experienced teaching environments as fundamentally misaligned with these needs, acting as a primary catalyst to seek alternative professional contexts where well-being could be intentionally prioritized and protected.

Based on Self-Determination Theory, this theme shows how autonomy and relatedness created sustained engagement and motivation. Schlossberg's framework reveals how situational

pressures and relational supports could influence both the transition decision and the capacity to adjust. These findings indicate that successful transitions to instructional design are strongly linked to participants prioritising personal well-being.

Theme 4: Cultivating Productive Relationships

Relationships were central to participants' transition into instructional design where success, adjustment, and professional sustainability hinged on relational engagement, not just technical competence. Instructional design is inherently collaborative, requiring ongoing interaction with colleagues, subject matter experts, and professional communities. Therefore, cultivating productive relationships was integral to effective functioning in instructional design roles.

From a theoretical standpoint, this theme aligns most strongly with relatedness within Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and with the support dimension of Schlossberg's transition framework. The role of connection in mitigating transition-related uncertainty and maintaining long-term motivation is evident in participants' narratives. Specifically, the ability to exchange ideas, ask questions, and collaborate on problem-solving was crucial. This significant theme is further explored in the next sub-theme.

4.1: Social Capital as a Metric for Success

Participants framed success in instructional design less in terms of individual achievement and more in relation to their ability to cultivate and access social capital. Instructional design is inherently relational, necessitating continuous coordination, negotiation, and communication, as indicated by participants. This reliance on relational resources constitutes social capital, which was instrumental in fostering collaboration, learning, and professional

credibility within this context. EVT usefully complements this interpretation by showing how social capital can operate as an expectancy-support mechanism. Access to peers, mentors, and professional communities appeared to increase participants' confidence that they could meet role demands (higher expectancy beliefs) while also lowering perceived costs by reducing isolation and accelerating problem-solving. In this way, relationships were not only emotionally sustaining (SDT-relatedness) but also practically instrumental in supporting persistence and performance.

Participant EC's narrative illustrates how relational and collaborative practices were embedded in his classroom teaching long before his formal transition. Reflecting on his approach to developing materials during the COVID-19 pandemic, he noted: "I had to share sections… let's just build it so that every student can access the demonstrations if they need to." In this context, "sections" referred to both diverse student groups and colleagues teaching the same curriculum. His decision to record and distribute these demonstrations was driven by more than mere efficiency; it was an act of dual advocacy for both students and peers. While rooted in his K–12 experience, this example reveals an emergent design orientation, one that reimagines instructional materials as shared pedagogical resources rather than private, individually owned products.

EC also described the relational dynamics involved in working with subject matter experts, noting, "I need to poke and prod a little bit… from an SME [Subject Matter Expert] perspective." This phrasing highlights the interpersonal sensitivity required in instructional design roles. Rather than exercising authority unilaterally, EC positioned their work as relational negotiation, requiring trust, tact, and ongoing dialogue. Such interactions demonstrate how social capital is built through repeated, respectful engagement rather than formal power.

Participant CH emphasized relational competence, particularly in overcoming stereotypes about their teaching background. CH's comment about adapting to a university setting—"I was able to demonstrate that I could work with grown-ups too"—reveals relational performance was crucial. This suggests instructional design success required proving effective collaboration with adult colleagues, not just technical skills.

For CH, demonstrating relational competence was critical in establishing professional legitimacy. The ability to work productively with others functioned as evidence that teaching experience was not a limitation, but a transferable asset. From an SDT perspective, this recognition supported relatedness by fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance within new professional communities.

Participant CB's account further illustrates how social capital functioned as a critical resource during his transition. Enrolled in a graduate certificate program at Athabasca University, specifically designed to transition educators into instructional design, CB benefited from a structured academic cohort of peers navigating similar career shifts. Reflecting on the value of this group, he noted: "The cohort was really good because we had to meet together and talk about things." These virtual interactions provided a vital forum for unpacking complex concepts like needs analysis and curriculum design, while offering a space to contrast instructional design with their prior professional identities. By collaboratively navigating unfamiliar terminology and expectations, the cohort offered both informational support and emotional reassurance. In this capacity, the academic cohort acted as an early professional community, mitigating the isolation inherent in shedding a long-established teaching identity.

At the same time, CB highlighted how instructional design work—particularly contract-based work—could be isolating, stating, “Moving into contract work, a lot of times I was the only person doing it.” This contrast underscores the importance of intentional relationship-building in instructional design contexts. When formal structures for collaboration were absent, participants had to actively seek out or sustain connections to avoid professional isolation.

CB also noted that shared professional histories facilitated relationship-building, explaining, “All of the people I worked with were former teachers too.” This shared background created a foundation of mutual understanding, allowing participants to draw on common experiences and language. Such shared identity functioned as a form of social capital, enabling quicker trust-building and smoother collaboration.

Participant JR’s contribution, while brief, further reinforces the role of relational continuity. JR concluded their interview by stating, “If you have any questions, you know how to find me and we can chat again.” This offer of ongoing connection reflects how professional relationships extended beyond discrete interactions. Social capital was not limited to immediate problem-solving; it represented an enduring network that participants could draw upon over time.

Schlossberg's framework highlights these relational dynamics as crucial support for adjustment. Access to peers, mentors, and networks lessened uncertainty and offered guidance during role ambiguity. Simultaneously, participants actively fostered these relationships, making social capital both a support and a strategy. Participants’ narratives also suggest that cultivating productive relationships functioned as a form of identity work. Through relational engagement, participants negotiated how they were perceived within instructional design contexts and how

they understood themselves as professionals. Successfully building and maintaining relationships reinforced participants' emerging identities as instructional designers rather than as outsiders transitioning from teaching.

Participant CH's emphasis on demonstrating the ability to "work with grown ups" reflects this identity negotiation. The need to demonstrate relational competence indicates an awareness of being evaluated not only on technical knowledge, but on interpersonal effectiveness. Through successful collaboration, participants were able to counter stereotypes and assert their legitimacy within new professional spaces. This process aligns with SDT's emphasis on relatedness as a foundation for internalised motivation. Feeling recognised and valued within professional communities made instructional design work more self-endorsed and meaningful. Thus, belonging served as a motivational resource beyond the initial transition.

Participant EC's focus on collaborative design and negotiation with SMEs further illustrates how relational work shaped professional identity. By engaging others in shared problem-solving, EC positioned themselves as a facilitator and partner rather than a peripheral contributor. This relational positioning reinforced a sense of competence and professional agency.

Across participant accounts, social capital was closely linked to perceptions of long-term sustainability in instructional design roles. Participants framed success not as individual mastery achieved in isolation, but as continued participation in relational networks that enabled learning, adaptation, and resilience. Instructional design work was consistently described as interdependent. Participants relied on colleagues for feedback, SMEs for content expertise, and

professional communities for validation and growth. Navigating this interdependence required relational skills often developed through teaching and carried into instructional design contexts.

Schlossberg viewed social capital as both a support and a coping mechanism. Relationships lessened transition stress by offering information and reassurance; participants' proactive engagement with others was an adaptive strategy for managing uncertainty. They didn't just receive support, but actively facilitated relationships that aligned with their professional goals and values.

This proactive relational stance also reinforced autonomy. By choosing how and when to engage with others, participants exercised agency within their roles. Social capital was not something that happened to them; it was something they built intentionally as part of their professional practice.

Summary of Theme 4

Theme 4 underscores how important productive relationships are to a successful transition into instructional design. Rather than focusing solely on technical output, participants consistently viewed social capital—built through collaboration with colleagues, negotiations with subject matter experts (SMEs), and active professional networking—as a primary metric of success. Ultimately, instructional design emerged as a profoundly relational field, where professional efficacy depends as much on the ability to cultivate meaningful partnerships as it does on technical expertise.

Anchored in Self-Determination Theory, this theme highlights the importance of relatedness in sustaining motivation and engagement. Through Schlossberg's transition framework, it shows how relational supports functioned as critical resources that facilitated

adjustment and long-term sustainability. Cultivating productive relationships is foundational to instructional design work; indeed, participants experienced success and belonging in their new professional roles largely because of these relationships, suggesting they are not peripheral to the field.

Chapter Summary

The transition from K–12 teaching into instructional design is a complex, multi-dimensional process shaped by the interaction of professional identity, motivation, personal circumstances, and relational support. Across the four themes, participants described how they reframed prior teaching experiences, reconciled instructional design expectations, anchored their decisions in personal well-being, and cultivated productive relationships as central to navigating their transitions.

Viewed through Self-Determination Theory, participants' narratives highlight the importance of competence, autonomy, and relatedness in sustaining motivation during career change. Participants described regaining a sense of competence by recognising the transferability of teaching skills, exercising autonomy by pursuing roles aligned with personal values and life circumstances, and fulfilling relatedness needs through supportive professional and personal relationships. When these psychological needs were supported, participants experienced instructional design work as meaningful and sustainable rather than as a departure from their teaching identities.

EVT extends this interpretation by highlighting how participants weighed the anticipated benefits of instructional design (e.g., sustainability, flexibility, professional growth) against the perceived costs of remaining in teaching, and how expectancy beliefs strengthened as

participants accumulated evidence of competence through practice, learning, and supportive networks.

Through Schlossberg's Transition Theory, the findings underscore how transitions were shaped by participants' specific situations (e.g., contract precarity, workplace conditions, relocation), their sense of self (evolving professional identities and values), available supports (family, cohorts, colleagues, professional networks), and strategies (reframing experience, seeking flexibility, building social capital). Participants' ability to actively engage these dimensions influenced both the ease of transition and their longer-term adjustment.

Together, these findings suggest that transitions into instructional design are not linear or uniform but rather they are deeply contextual and identity-driven. Participants did not simply move from one role to another; they engaged in ongoing sense-making processes that integrated past experiences with new professional demands.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter offers a comprehensive discussion of the findings presented in Chapter Four by situating them within relevant theoretical and empirical contexts. The research aimed to explore the lived experiences of former K–12 teachers who transitioned into the field of instructional design, focusing particularly on their motivations, challenges, and processes of professional identity reconstruction. Drawing from qualitative narratives, the study examined how participants articulated the decision to leave classroom teaching and embrace a pedagogically adjacent, (yet distinct) career in instructional design. In my discussion, I analysed the extent to which the theoretical frameworks of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981) explain participants' motivations and experiences. In addition, Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) is introduced as a complementary perspective that provides insight into future-oriented motivation and career decision-making under uncertainty.

These frameworks collectively provide a layered view of career reinvention, focusing on internal needs, cognitive evaluation, and adaptive strategies. Interpreting the findings through these lenses challenges linear transition models, emphasizing the temporal, emotional, and symbolic complexities of changing professional identities. The chapter ends with a reflection on limitations, future research directions, and the implications for theory, practice, and policy.

Interpreting the Findings Through and Beyond Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), as developed by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000), provides a foundational framework for understanding human motivation, particularly in

educational and occupational contexts. At its core, SDT posits that optimal motivation and psychological well-being are contingent upon the satisfaction of three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these needs are fulfilled, individuals are more likely to engage in activities with intrinsic interest and internalised values, leading to enhanced performance, persistence, and satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

In applying SDT to the transition experiences of former K–12 teachers, this study initially hypothesised that participants would report career changes prompted by deficits in these psychological needs within the teaching profession and by the perceived fulfilment of those needs within the field of instructional design. While the data supported this hypothesis in some respects, a more complex picture emerged—one that challenges SDT's linear temporal structure and simplified motivational causality.

Autonomy was the most salient factor in participants' decisions to leave teaching, which they described as self-initiated and aligned with personal values, despite external pressures like burnout and systemic changes. This suggests institutional pressure amplified the desire for autonomy, prompting participants to reclaim professional control. Their move to instructional design aligns with SDT's identified regulation (Deci & Ryan, 2000), indicating it was a positive shift toward a more autonomous work life, allowing for greater decision-making power, creative control, and intellectual freedom.

The psychological need for competence, however, presented a more ambivalent and evolving dynamic. Participants acknowledged that certain teaching-related competencies—such as lesson planning, learner assessment, and content sequencing—transferred effectively into instructional design. Participants noted significant technical skill gaps, particularly in LMS,

multimedia design, project management software, and industry terminology. Crucially, many began working without these skills, relying instead on their self-efficacy—a belief in their capacity to learn and adapt, which aligns with Bandura's (1997) theory.

This finding might pose a challenge to SDT's original formulation, which assumes that competence must be sufficiently developed before individuals can engage in autonomous, self-directed activity (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The data from this study suggest that in real-world contexts, particularly in adult career transitions, individuals often act in conditions of partial preparedness, driven not by present mastery but by a confidence in potential growth. This aligns with Dweck's (2006) work on growth mindset, which highlights the motivational power of framing competence as expandable through effort and learning. Therefore, SDT may benefit from integrating more fluid and developmental models of competence, especially when applied to contexts of professional reinvention and adult learning.

Regarding relatedness, participants' experiences often diverged from the baseline assumptions of SDT. Many described initial periods of professional isolation, particularly when entering remote environments or corporate settings where they were the sole former educators. Several also reported battling imposter syndrome during the early months of their new roles. Consequently, relatedness was not a given precondition of their transition, but rather an emergent outcome—something built over time through intentional social navigation, trust-building, and collaborative projects. This distinction is significant; it underscores that belonging and professional community are not guaranteed, but must be actively constructed, especially in hybrid or digital workplaces where informal support and peer interaction are often scarce

This delayed and constructed sense of relatedness raises questions about how SDT assumes motivation unfolds over time. SDT suggests a clear sequence: psychological needs are met, intrinsic motivation develops, and then people take action. However, the findings of this study point to a different pattern. In many cases, participants changed careers before their needs were fulfilled, driven instead by the hope or expectation that these needs would be met in the future. This suggests that action can come first, especially in adult development, where decisions are often shaped by identity and anticipation rather than by already-satisfied needs (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020; Jeno et al., 2018).

While SDT offers a strong framework for understanding motivation in career transitions, its usefulness is limited by its focus on the present and its assumption of a linear process. In this study, autonomy, competence, and relatedness were often not fully present at the time decisions were made. Instead, they functioned as future goals that participants expected to achieve in a new professional context. This suggests that SDT is best used alongside theories that better capture future-oriented thinking, emotional tension, and identity negotiation, all of which play a key role in adult career change.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory and the Adaptive Dimensions of Change

Where Self-Determination Theory focuses on motivational antecedents to behaviour, Schlossberg's Transition Theory (STT) shifts the analytical focus to the process of navigating change itself. Developed by Schlossberg (1981), the theory defines transition as any event or non-event that results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world, requiring corresponding changes in behaviour and relationships. The model's central contribution lies in

its “4 S System”—Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies—which provides a holistic framework for examining how individuals cope with transitions and the resources they draw upon.

Within this study, Schlossberg’s Transition Theory (STT) proved particularly effective at understanding participants’ post-decision experiences—the emotional, structural, and cognitive labor required to inhabit a new professional identity. For many, the "situation" was defined by a tension between push and pull factors: while burnout and administrative overload served as catalysts for leaving teaching, the promise of flexibility and creative alignment drew them toward instructional design. Even though most transitions were self-initiated and anticipated, participants often underestimated the sheer scale of the required reinvention. This gap between expectation and reality highlights the importance of Schlossberg’s contextual appraisal, revealing how much the success of a transition depends on an individual’s perception of its magnitude, timing, and personal control.

The “self” dimension was reflected in participants’ resilience, adaptability, and reflective capacity. Many drew upon their pedagogical training and experience as psychological anchors, allowing them to frame their new roles as extensions rather than abandonments of their prior identities. This reflects what Goodman, et al. (2012) describe as identity continuity, whereby individuals preserve aspects of the self during periods of transition. However, the data also revealed moments of identity disruption, especially when participants encountered unfamiliar professional cultures, languages, and evaluative metrics. Several described feelings of professional disorientation, imposter syndrome, or fear of not being “legitimate” in their new roles. These moments were managed not only through personal reflection but through the active construction of new narratives of competence and value.

The “support” dimension was clearly visible in the diverse ways participants mobilized resources to navigate their transitions. While some benefited from formal employer onboarding, most relied on a self-assembled mix of peer networks, online communities, and informal mentorships. Platforms like LinkedIn and various instructional design forums were particularly vital, offering not just technical advice but a sense of professional belonging and access to tacit knowledge. This reliance on virtual networks aligns with modern extensions of STT, which emphasize the growing importance of digital and distributed support systems in navigating contemporary career shifts (Goodman et al., 2012).

Finally, the “strategies” participants employed to cope with transition were diverse and often self-constructed. These included self-directed learning, time-blocking for skill development, seeking out YouTube tutorials, building portfolios, and using cognitive reframing techniques to manage anxiety and self-doubt. The metaphor of “becoming a beginner again” recurred across narratives, suggesting that participants engaged in deliberate role deconstruction and reconstruction as they learned to inhabit their new professional identities.

Despite its strengths, STT is limited by its focus on adaptation rather than motivation. It is a descriptive model of how people manage transition rather than a predictive theory of why they seek it. It assumes that the decision to change has already occurred and thus may under-theorise the complex emotional, ethical, and aspirational work that precedes action. For this reason, STT is most productively paired with theories—like SDT and EVT—that can illuminate the motivational and evaluative dimensions of career decision-making.

Reflections on Theoretical Fit, Analytic Tensions, and Emerging Complexity

While Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Schlossberg's Transition Theory provided a strong foundation for interpreting participants' motivation, coping, and adjustment from K–12 teaching to instructional design, they did not fully capture the complexity of the experiences. SDT helped interpret accounts of constrained autonomy in K–12, efforts to build competence through skill acquisition, and the need for belonging in new communities. Schlossberg's framework similarly organized analysis of how situational conditions (e.g., contract precarity, relocation, safety, workload), personal resources, supports, and coping strategies shaped transition paths.

Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) contributed additional explanatory depth in a different angle. EVT was most useful for interpreting how participants' engagement in learning and adjustment strategies was sustained over time, particularly as participants weighed perceived benefits and perceived costs of both teaching and instructional design. Across these accounts, participants were engaged in a continuous evaluation of instructional design's potential for long-term sustainability, flexibility, and career viability. This was framed against the escalating costs of remaining in the classroom—most notably workload spillover, emotional exhaustion, and a diminished capacity to meet family obligations. In this light, the transition is best understood as more than just a search for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (SDT), or an adaptive response to situation and support (Schlossberg). Rather, it was a dynamic process of ongoing appraisal, where participants constantly recalibrated their perceived costs, personal values, and expectations for success through the lens of their lived experience.

At the same time, the findings also revealed theoretical tensions that suggest the limits of SDT, Schlossberg, and EVT when applied to complex career transitions involving identity disruption and broader institutional critique. Participants did not merely describe why they left teaching or how they adjusted to instructional design roles; they described shifts in professional self-understanding, legitimacy, and meaning. In several instances, expressions of autonomy loss were intertwined with critiques of systemic conditions in schooling, and efforts to rebuild competence in instructional design co-occurred with feelings of insecurity, professional illegitimacy, or lingering attachment to former identities. These dimensions point to experiences that are not fully captured by motivational regulation (SDT), transition resource mapping (Schlossberg), or cost–value expectancy appraisals (EVT) alone.

Rather than undermining the usefulness of these frameworks, these tensions clarify the boundaries of their explanatory power and indicate why additional theoretical perspectives may be warranted to account for identity work, narrative continuity, and the socio-cultural contexts in which transitions unfold. Accordingly, the theoretical expansion in Chapter 5 is not intended as a post hoc overlay but as a reflexive extension prompted by sustained engagement with the data. Integrating supplementary lenses enables a more comprehensive interpretation—one that situates motivation and coping within broader processes of professional becoming, legitimacy negotiation, and meaning-making over time.

Expectancy-Value Theory as a Complementary Perspective

Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT), initially developed by Eccles and her colleagues (Spence, 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), is a prominent cognitive model of motivation that emphasises the role of beliefs about one's ability to succeed (expectancy) and the perceived

worth or importance of the task (value). The theory posits that the decision to engage in a particular activity is a function of these two factors, moderated by perceived costs, prior experiences, and cultural influences.

In this study, EVT offered critical explanation particularly in accounting for participants' willingness to pursue instructional design roles despite lacking full competency or institutional validation. Across narratives, participants expressed high task value, especially in terms of utility (greater flexibility, work-life balance, and salary), attainment (alignment with personal and professional values), and intrinsic interest (creative engagement with learning). Importantly, participants also displayed moderate to high expectancy beliefs—not grounded in actual technical proficiency, but in a belief that their teaching experience had equipped them with the meta-cognitive and relational tools to succeed.

This future-oriented confidence reflects EVT's emphasis on subjective task valuation and perceived success which were likely key drivers of behaviour. Moreover, EVT's recognition of cost—including effort, anxiety, and opportunity loss—proved particularly insightful. Participants were acutely aware of the risks and emotional costs of transition: the loss of a familiar identity, uncertainty about employability, and the challenge of learning new tools in unfamiliar environments. Yet, the perceived value of change consistently outweighed these costs. EVT therefore helps explain why action was taken under conditions of incomplete readiness, complementing SDT's focus on need fulfillment and STT's emphasis on adaptation.

Furthermore, EVT accounts for cultural and contextual variability in motivation, recognising that task value and expectancy beliefs are socially constructed and shaped by prior experiences, feedback, and societal expectations. This is particularly relevant in the context of

education-to-design transitions, where teaching is often devalued in corporate settings, and where former educators must negotiate new status hierarchies and professional legitimacies. The theory thus provides a framework for understanding the motivational resilience demonstrated by participants who persisted despite misalignment between their internal sense of value and external recognition.

By integrating EVT into the interpretive framework of this study, a more complete picture of motivation emerges—one that acknowledges not only the presence or absence of psychological needs, but also the future-oriented calculations, emotional labour, and strategic optimism that underpin adult career change. When used alongside SDT, Schlossberg's theory and Expectancy-Value theory can help explain not only why participants made their career shifts, but also how they coped with and sustained these changes over time, and how their personal values and expectancies align with their career shift.

Limitations of the Study

The present study offers meaningful insights into the lived experiences of former K–12 teachers transitioning into instructional design roles. Contextual limitations exist of a methodological and a theoretical nature/. This reflection serves not to diminish the study's value but to position its findings within a well-defined interpretive and epistemological frame, acknowledging the boundaries of its generalisability and analytical reach.

A primary limitation of this study is its small, purposefully selected sample of eight participants. While this size aligns with the goals of phenomenological inquiry, prioritizing depth and nuance over broad generalizability naturally invites questions regarding representativeness. Because these narratives center on individuals who successfully

navigated their career shifts, the findings are inherently subject to survivorship bias. The study does not capture the potentially divergent or less coherent experiences of those who attempted but failed to transition, those currently stalled in states of uncertainty, or those who returned to teaching after a brief endeavour into instructional design. These omitted voices are essential to mapping the full spectrum of career reinvention and would likely have revealed different patterns of motivation, resilience, or systemic constraint.

Furthermore, the retrospective and narrative nature of the interviews introduces epistemological complexities. As participants reflected on their past experiences, their accounts were mediated by memory, current professional identity, and the need to construct coherent life narratives. This aligns with Bruner's (1990) concept of narrative identity, which suggests that individuals often impose interpretive structure on past events to achieve a sense of psychological continuity. While such narrative reconstruction is itself meaningful data, it also implies that the stories shared are filtered through present-tense understandings. The transitions, as they were lived, may have involved more fragmentation, fear, and ambivalence than what participants were able or willing to recall.

Another limitation lies in the theoretical framing of the study, which, while purposeful, may have excluded alternative lenses. The research was grounded in three psychological theories—Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Schlossberg's Transition Theory (STT), and Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT)—which collectively emphasise internal motivation, coping strategies, and cognitive evaluation. However, these frameworks prioritise individual agency and intrapsychic processes, which, while valuable, may underemphasize the structural, relational, and cultural dimensions of career change. For example, broader institutional forces—such as neoliberal education policies, labour market precarity, and the commercialisation of professional

development—were acknowledged in participants' narratives (e.g., burnout, systemic misalignment) but not systematically analysed through a sociological or critical theory lens. This creates a partial view of transition, focusing more on personal meaning-making than on the ways in which power, privilege, and access shape career possibilities.

The cultural and geographic specificity of the participant sample further constrains the applicability of the findings. The participants were situated specifically in Canada, where instructional design has become a formalised and increasingly professionalised field. The pathways, barriers, and motivations associated with transition may differ significantly in other national or regional contexts, where educational systems vary, where the digital learning economy is less developed, or where teaching holds different cultural capital. For instance, in countries where public teaching is more respected, secure, or socially valued, the impetus to leave the profession may not manifest in the same ways or may carry different psychological and social costs. Therefore, extrapolating these findings globally is not possible.

The methodological approach was appropriate for eliciting rich, nuanced narratives, yet it also presented limitations. The structure of the interview guide, which was influenced by the pre-selected theoretical frameworks, may have inadvertently directed participants toward certain kinds of reflections. While care was taken to allow for open-ended exploration, the very act of framing questions around autonomy, coping, and expectancy may have privileged particular interpretive schemas. Additionally, because the interviews were conducted in a single session, participants may not have had enough time to reflect on and share the more complex or emotional parts of their experiences, particularly those related to grief, professional shame, or mixed feelings. However, participants were informed that they could be contacted for follow-up questions via email if clarification or additional information was needed. Other approaches—

such as keeping journals over a longer period, spending extended time observing participants in their work environments, or using creative methods like art or storytelling—may have helped reveal different aspects of their experiences, including emotional, bodily, and non-verbal elements of the transition.

Finally, the study's temporal framing may have artificially bounded the transition process. While participants were asked to reflect on the "before," "during," and "after" of their transition, the reality of career change is often ongoing and recursive. Professional identity is not reconstituted at a single moment of entry into a new role but continues to evolve through repeated experiences of validation, dissonance, and recalibration. This study captured snapshots of that journey but could not fully account for its ongoing and future-oriented nature.

In light of these limitations, I offer this work as a potentially valuable starting point for further research rather than a definitive account of the teacher-to-instructional-designer transition. My hope is that my study contributes in a modest way toward meaningfully understand professional reinvention in the context of educational and workplace change.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several pressing and generative avenues for future research on career transition, particularly within the increasingly blurred boundaries of education and digital design professions. These recommendations are motivated by the desire to develop a more comprehensive, inclusive, and theoretically robust understanding of how individuals navigate professional change in the context of contemporary labour markets.

First, there is an urgent need for longitudinal, process-oriented research that tracks individuals across the full arc of their career transition, not only retrospectively, but in real time.

Such studies could provide a more granular understanding of how motivations shift, how psychological needs are recalibrated, and how expectations evolve across different stages of the journey. Longitudinal approaches would allow researchers to trace the ebb and flow of identity negotiation, competence development, and support system formation. They could potentially also capture the nonlinear and iterative nature of transition, which often includes moments of regression, hesitation, or re-evaluation that may be lost in static interviews.

Second, future studies could expand the demographic, cultural, and professional diversity of participants. The current study focused on Canadian educators may serve as a useful directional marker as comparative research in global contexts is conducted. How do transitions manifest differently in countries with more rigid credentialing systems, greater job precarity, or different cultural attitudes toward teaching and instructional design? Equally important is the inclusion of voices from marginalised and underrepresented communities—including Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC), LGBTQ+ professionals, immigrants, individuals with disabilities, and those facing socioeconomic constraints. These voices are essential for understanding how intersectional barriers and privileges shape the feasibility, desirability, and emotional experience of career change.

Also of merit would be studies that would pursue multi-method and participatory research designs. While interviews are effective for accessing narrative meaning-making, they are limited in their ability to access embodied, affective, and relational dimensions of transition. Visual methodologies (e.g., photovoice, career journey mapping), participatory action research (PAR), or digital ethnography could uncover aspects of transition that remain tacit, intuitive, or difficult to verbalise. Such approaches would also facilitate co-construction of knowledge, empowering participants to actively shape the research agenda and its outcomes.

Theoretically, there is fertile ground for integrative and critical expansions of the frameworks used in this study. While Self-Determination Theory, Transition Theory, and Expectancy-Value Theory show important dimensions of motivation and adaptation, however, these theories overlook how power and professional expectations influence motivation and adaptation. Future research might incorporate theories from critical pedagogy (Freire, 1982), career construction theory (Savickas et al., 2009), or poststructuralist identity theory (Weedon, 1996) to more fully capture the socio-political forces that shape who can imagine, afford, and actualise career reinvention. Such theories also attend more directly to the emotional and symbolic labour involved in exiting one identity and constructing another, including experiences of grief, guilt, or liberation.

Conclusion

I began with a presumingly simple question: why do K–12 teachers choose to leave the classroom and become instructional designers? What emerged was not a straightforward narrative of career substitution, but a rich, multi-layered account of professional reinvention–a process marked by hope, doubt, grief, agency, and identity transformation. As demonstrated through the analyses of the lived experiences of eight individuals, career change is not merely a rational response to dissatisfaction, nor is it solely a cognitive evaluation of opportunities. It is a deeply human process in which meaning, selfhood, and value are negotiated amidst uncertainty.

The integration of Self-Determination Theory, Schlossberg's Transition Theory, and Expectancy-Value Theory offered a theoretically grounded yet flexible framework for interpreting these experiences. SDT illuminated the centrality of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, but also highlighted that these needs often function as aspirations rather than

preconditions. STT made visible the emotional and strategic labour required to adapt to new professional environments. EVT provided critical insight into how individuals make decisions under conditions of incomplete readiness, balancing hope against risk, and imagining futures that feel worth pursuing.

These findings challenge dominant models of career development that assume linearity, preparedness, or coherent identity. Instead, they support a model of transition as recursive, emotionally charged, and narratively constructed. Instructional design, for the participants in this study, was not just a new job—it was a new narrative, a rearticulation of self, and a reclaiming of professional values that had evolved throughout their careers.

Ultimately, this study affirms the complexity of human motivation and the resilience of professionals who dare to reimagine their working lives. It underscores the importance of building systems—educational, institutional, and psychological—that honour not only skill development but also identity, meaning, and wellbeing. As the nature of work continues to evolve, and as more professionals find themselves questioning inherited career scripts, the need to understand and support the process of vocational transformation becomes not only academically relevant but socially urgent.

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Appendix

APPENDIX A: Recruitment Form

Recruitment Form: Microsoft Form

Study Title: Designing Forward: Exploring K–12 Teachers' Transition into Instructional Design Roles

Introduction Thank you for your interest in this research study! This short form will help determine if you meet the eligibility criteria to participate. It should take less than 5 minutes to complete. All information will remain confidential and used solely for research purposes. If you qualify, you will be contacted to review the consent form and schedule an interview.

Participant Information

1. **Full Name:**
2. **Email Address:**
3. **Current Location:**
4. **Are you at least 18 years old?** * Yes / No
5. **Did you previously work as a K-12 classroom teacher in Canada?** * Yes / No
6. **How many years of K-12 classroom teaching experience do you have?** * Less than 2 years / 2-5 years / 6-10 years / More than 10 years
7. **Do you currently work as an instructional designer?** * Yes / No

8. **How long have you been working in your current instructional design role? *** Less than 6 months / 6 months to 1 year / 1 to 2 years / Over 2 years

9. **Do you consider yourself fully transitioned out of K-12 classroom teaching (i.e., no longer actively teaching in K-12 schools)? *** Yes / No

10. **Would you be willing to participate in a 45-60 minute virtual interview as part of this study? *** Yes / No / Maybe, I have questions

11. **Is there anything else you'd like to share with the researcher at this stage?**

APPENDIX B: Invitation Letter

Dear [Participant's Name],

Thank you for your interest in my research study titled:

"Designing Forward: Exploring K–12 Teachers' Transition into Instructional Design Roles"

Based on your screening form responses, you meet the eligibility criteria to participate. I would like to formally invite you to take part in a virtual one-on-one interview, which will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The interview will focus on your transition from K–12 teaching to instructional design, and the motivations, challenges, and skills involved.

Please find the informed consent form attached. Kindly review the document and return a signed copy before we schedule the interview. You are welcome to reach out if you have any questions or concerns about participation.

Thank you again for your interest. I truly look forward to hearing your story.

Best,

Ro Adante

Master's Student, University of Victoria

rodelynadante@uvic.ca

APPENDIX C: Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Curriculum & Instruction

Designing Forward: Exploring K–12 Teachers' Transition into Instructional Design Roles

Who is conducting the study?

You are invited to participate in this study **Designing Forward: Exploring K–12 Teachers' Transition into Instructional Design Roles** that is being conducted by Ms. Rodelyn Adante.

This study will be conducted by Ms. Rodelyn Adante, a graduate student in the Department of **Curriculum & Instruction** at the University of Victoria.

Ms. Adante can be contacted by telephone at **(250) 415-2099** or by e-mail at **rodelynadante@uvic.ca**

As a graduate student, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a degree in **Master of Arts in Educational Studies.** This research is being conducted under the supervision of **Michael Paskevicius, PhD**, who can be contacted by e-mail at **mpaskevi@uvic.ca**.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research study is to explore the motivations, challenges, and competency development of K-12 teachers who are transitioning into instructional design roles. As more educators consider career shifts—often due to burnout, evolving job demands, or a desire for professional growth—this study aims to better understand both the internal and external factors influencing these decisions. Through qualitative research methods, the study will examine the lived experiences of teachers making this transition, focusing on the challenges they face, the competencies they develop, and the factors that support their success. This research seeks to contribute to the existing literature on career mobility in education and provide practical insights for supporting teachers through these transitions. Findings may help educational institutions, training programs, and individual educators better navigate the shift from classroom teaching to instructional design.

The study is important because it addresses a growing need to understand how K-12 educators can successfully transition into instructional design roles—a shift that is becoming more common due to different factors. By exploring the motivations, challenges, and supports involved in this career change, the research aims to deepen understanding of the transition from teaching to instructional design and contribute to the broader body of knowledge in the field.

You have been invited to participate because you are a former K-12 teacher who has experience transitioning into an instructional design role. Your insights and lived experiences are valuable to this study, as they can help deepen the understanding of the motivations, challenges, and competencies involved in making this career shift.

It's your choice whether or not you want to take part in this study.

Your participation is voluntary.

If I choose take part in this study, what will I do?

If you take part in this study, you will:

- Participate in a **semi-structured interview** lasting approximately 45–60 minutes, conducted either online via Zoom or in person, depending on your preference and availability.
- Be asked **open-ended questions** about your personal experiences transitioning from a K-12 teaching role to an instructional design position. Topics may include your motivations for the transition, the challenges you faced, the competencies you developed, and any formal or informal training you undertook. Example questions include:
    - *What initially motivated you to shift from teaching to instructional design?*
    - *What helped you build your sense of competence in this new field?*
    - *In what ways has this transition helped you grow personally and professionally?*
- Answer **basic demographic questions**, such as your age, years of teaching experience, current role, and educational background. These questions are asked to provide context for your responses and to identify patterns across participants.
- You may be invited to participate in a **follow-up interview**, where you can expand on your experiences and engage with others who have gone through similar transitions.
- No tests or physical equipment will be used in this study. There will be no tasks or assessments required beyond the interview itself.

Since the study follows a qualitative approach, the researcher will be using semi-structured interviews which will be done via Zoom or Teams, whichever you prefer. We have a UVic-hosted version of Zoom and Teams with a number of security and privacy features that are not available in the free versions of the said applications. This is to ensure the security of both the researcher and participant. Only the researcher has the recordings since they will be recorded on local computer devices and saved on a hard drive, not in the cloud.

You do not have to answer any questions or complete any tests that make you feel uncomfortable.

How long will this take?

Approximately, the interviews will take about 45-60 minutes and will be conducted via Zoom or Teams. However, since this is qualitative research and the instrument to be used is semi-structured interviews, please bear in mind that it would sometimes be more than the said time of participation depending on the flow of the interview and the answers of the participant.

What are the possible harms and discomforts?

There are no known risks associated with taking part in this study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

Although you may not benefit directly from the study, the results may enhance understanding of the transition from teaching to instructional design and contribute to the broader body of knowledge in the fields of education and instructional design.

Who will see my information?

Data for this study will be collected through audio-recorded semi-structured interviews. Your name and identifying details will be collected for the purposes of scheduling, communication, and context during analysis. However, when your responses are included in the final written report, all identifying information will be removed or generalized to protect your privacy. For example, a statement such as *"I work for Telus now"* will be redacted and presented as *"I work for a telecommunications company."*

To protect your confidentiality:

- Interview transcripts will be de-identified before analysis by removing or generalizing names of people, organizations, locations, and any other personally identifiable information.
- Participants will be assigned a unique code or pseudonym. Only the researcher and the thesis supervisor will have access to the original data, including names and identifiers, during the data collection and analysis stages.

Information collected during this study will be stored and secured in the following ways:

- All digital files (audio recordings, transcripts, and notes) will be stored on a password-protected and encrypted computer and backed up in secure cloud storage.

Information collected during this study will be stored for five (5) years after the completion of the study. At the end of this period:

- All audio recordings and digital files will be permanently deleted.

How will the study results be shared?

Findings from this study will be reported in journal articles, books, a thesis, and presented at workshops or conferences. Your name will not be used in these publications or presentations to maintain confidentiality and ensure your privacy. Any identifying information will be anonymized or removed so that your responses cannot be traced back to you. This approach aims to create a safe space for open and honest sharing.

Please note:

You may end the interview at any time.

You may change your mind and withdraw from this study at any time. There is no need to explain why you have changed your mind.

If you withdraw from the study your contribution will not be used in the analysis or final report.

If you have any questions or if you would like to discuss this study further, please contact the researcher/ research assistant by telephone at (250) 415-2099 or by e-mail at rodelynadante@uvic.ca.

You can also contact the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria at 250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca, to check the ethical approval of this study, or to raise any concerns you might have.

Please remember that participation in this study is voluntary.

Consent:

I have read this consent letter…….....yes…….no

I have had the opportunity to ask questions...……...…….....yes…….no

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary .....yes……no

I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time…….....yes…….no

I agree to take part in the study……..…….....yes…….no

I agree to have my interview recorded…….yes…….no

Name of Participant	*Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this consent letter will be left with you and the researcher will take a copy.

APPENDIX D: Interview Protocol

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for K–12 Teachers Transitioning into Instructional Design

Opening Procedure

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher briefly introduced herself, including her academic background and professional experience in educational technology and instructional design. The researcher also shared her personal interest in the topic and the motivations for conducting the study, in order to establish rapport and provide context for the research.

Participants were then invited to introduce themselves and describe their professional background, including their teaching experience and current role.

The purpose of the study and the overall structure of the interview were explained.

Consent Script (Verbatim)

The following script was used to obtain informed consent prior to each interview:

Hi, and thank you for joining me today. Before we begin, I'd like to quickly review your rights as a participant in this study.

This interview is part of my research on the transition of K–12 teachers into instructional design roles. It should take about 45 to 60 minutes, and everything you share will be kept confidential. Your name and identifying details will not appear in the final report. You're free to skip any questions, and you can stop the interview at any time—no explanation needed.

With your permission, I'll record our conversation for accuracy. The recording will be securely stored locally in my computer and deleted five years after the study is complete.

Do you consent to participate in this interview?

Do you consent to having the interview audio recorded?

Verbal consent was obtained before proceeding.

Interview Questions

The interview followed a semi-structured format guided by two theoretical frameworks. Questions were asked flexibly, with follow-up prompts used where appropriate.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan)

Focus: Autonomy, Competence, Relatedness

1. Motivation & Autonomy
    - What initially motivated you to shift from teaching to instructional design?
    - To what extent did you feel you had control over this decision?
2. Competence
    - How confident did you feel in your skills when you began your instructional design role?
    - What helped you build your sense of competence in this new field?
3. Relatedness

- How connected did you feel to your new team or community of instructional designers?
- Were there any mentors or peers who made you feel supported during the transition?

4. Sustained Motivation
    - What aspects of your new role continue to motivate you today?
    - Do you feel your current work aligns with your values and goals?

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Focus: Situation, Self, Support, Strategies

1. Situation
    - Can you describe the moment or circumstance that triggered your transition into instructional design?
    - Was this transition planned, or did it come as a surprise?
2. Self
    - How did you perceive yourself during the transition? (e.g., ready, unsure, excited, overwhelmed)
    - What personal characteristics or past experiences helped or hindered your transition?
3. Support

- What types of support (emotional, informational, institutional) were available to you?
- Which forms of support were most helpful in navigating the transition?

4. Strategies
    - What actions or strategies did you use to adapt to your new role?
    - How did you deal with moments of uncertainty or challenge during the transition?

Cross-Theory Integrative Questions

1. Looking back, what would you say were the biggest internal or external factors influencing your motivation to persist in this new field?
2. In what ways has this transition helped you grow personally and professionally?

Probing Prompts

Probing questions were used throughout the interview to encourage elaboration and clarification. These included:

- Can you tell me more about that?
- How did that make you feel?
- What happened next?
- Why do you think that was important for you?
- Could you give an example?

Closing Procedure

At the end of each interview, participants were invited to share any additional thoughts or experiences that had not been covered.

Participants were informed that they could contact the researcher if they later wished to add further reflections. They were also offered the option to receive a copy of the completed thesis upon request.

The researcher thanked participants for their time and contribution.