

EXPLORING THE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ATTITUDES OF FOUR THRIVING  
EARLY CAREER TEACHERS IN SASKATCHEWAN

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By

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## **Abstract**

Governments and institutions who train teachers have developed high performing systems, which aim to advance teaching competencies (i.e. knowledge, skills, and attitudes) and strengthen teacher quality and capacity for resilience (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; O’Flaherty & Beal 2018). These systems incorporate personal, interpersonal, and pedagogical abilities and support the development of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skill sets, designed to strengthen teaching practice in support of student learning and well-being. Despite sufficient preparation, the occupation of teaching is known for moderate to high rates of attrition, with stress and burnout as factors that cause up to half of new teachers to leave the profession within the first five years (Canadian Teacher’s Federation, 2014; Kutsyuruba, Walker, Stasel, & Al Makhamreh, 2019). In Saskatchewan, teaching competencies are regulated through provincial standards, which outline goals to support teacher education in several domains (Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education; Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board). The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn from the lives and experiences of four early career teachers (ECTs) in Saskatchewan, who, despite facing adversity, were thriving in their respective roles. Multiple sources of data (observations, interviews, journals) were analyzed thematically through an interpretive case study supporting an understanding of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the four thriving ECTs. Though each faced challenges, they displayed strengths that helped them to be confident and competent educators. The results highlighted the needs of early career teachers by sharing a perspective that is less understood in the literature. A thematic analysis culminated in themes conducive to implications for a thriving teaching practice.

*Key Words:* Qualitative Research, Interpretive Case Study, Thematic Analysis, Social Constructivism, Thriving Early Career Teachers, Teacher Competencies, Teacher Education, Teacher Resilience.

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## Dedication

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **Introduction**

The profession of teaching draws aspiring educators to what can be a motivating and rewarding life-long career. For some, however, the experience of teaching culminates with stress, pressure, and early career burnout. Data from across North America notes that between 30% to 50% of new teachers walk away from teaching within the first five years (Kutsyuruba, Walker, Stasel, & Al Makhamreh, 2019). In Saskatchewan, a recent survey completed by the NDP government reported that 40% of the province’s teachers had “seriously considered leaving the profession” (Brighter Future Education Survey Results, 2019). At best these statistics offer insight into the challenges of teaching, and at worst they may dissuade aspiring educators away from the profession altogether. In spending time with those who experienced success, as early career teachers (ECTs), this study aimed to gain insight into the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that promote and support a thriving teaching practice.

### **Organization of Chapters**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters, each of which takes advantage of a first-person and third-person narrative, as appropriate, throughout. Chapter One introduces the reader to the context and background of the study. Chapter Two provides a review of the relevant literature, including historical and political contexts; the current landscape of teaching trends and issues; an overview of relevant features of teacher education; and factors contributing to attrition and teacher retention. Chapter Three covers the theoretical framework of social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) and methodological choices in line with a constructivist case study approach to research (Creswell, 2013). Epistemological orientations around the construction of knowledge through a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) are included therein. The third chapter also

highlights case study as the framework for the methods used in this qualitative research, and shares information pertaining to recruitment, participants, procedures, and process. Chapter Four presents data and findings, weaving together the narratives of the four participants with the developing themes. The final chapter presents a discussion, providing implications, considerations, and conclusions from this work, with directions for future research.

### **Contextual Overview: Early Career Teaching in Saskatchewan**

In Saskatchewan, upon completion of a four-year Bachelor of Education Degree (B.Ed.), teacher candidates (TCs) are licenced to teach at any level in the K – 12 school system. Though most teachers have specialties in one or more subject areas, and at particular grade levels, many enter the profession as generalists, tasked with the responsibility of providing engaging and well-planned learning opportunities for diverse and complex groups of students. Given the multidisciplinary nature of teaching in Saskatchewan, preparedness for the profession involves the development of skills in a variety of domains. These domains include curricula and pedagogy; practical and innovative instructional strategies; a working knowledge of psychology, including behaviour, motivation, and learning strategies; appropriate approaches to on-going forms of assessment; and knowledge that supports classroom management and student well-being, including an understanding of the mental health needs of students (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011; Friedman, 2006; Laskey & Hetzel, 2010; Oliver & Reschly, 2007; Pachauri & Yadav, 2014; Romano, 2008; Rosenzweig, 2009; Schulz, 2008; Westling, 2010).

In order to meet the demands of the profession, and support the needs of teachers and students, the province of Saskatchewan holds educators accountable to professional standards, which are referred to as competencies. These competencies are outlined and upheld by the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (2018, Appendix A), The Ministry of Education (Appendix

B), and the Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board (SPTRB, Appendix C).

Personal and professional development among the competencies starts early in teacher education programs, and both of the province's two universities support the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that meet the necessary components of teacher certification under the SPTRB. Training teachers to thrive, with expertise in various domains, is a necessary component of teacher and student success (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

At the University of Saskatchewan, the pre-service teacher education program offered through the College of Education attends to Saskatchewan Teacher Education Classification and Certification (TECC) through goals that cover a broad range of skills. These goals, approved by the Ministry of Education, are aimed at promoting and upholding the development of social, emotional, academic, and cultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes that support safety and learning for students in schools. In summary, the goals, regulations, and competencies outlined for teachers in the province of Saskatchewan honour the following (Summarized from Appendices A, B, and C):

1. The maintenance and management of a safe and caring learning environment that supports students' holistic health needs and promotes a sense of safety and well-being.
2. Skilled instruction, targeted assessments, and the delivery of ongoing feedback to support academic material, including necessary adaptations, accommodations, and modifications to support diverse student needs, abilities, and cultural diversity.
3. The promotion of healthy boundaries and professional relationships.

These competencies, reflective of the training and registering institutions in the province of Saskatchewan, are written into provincial handbooks, curricula, and other supporting documents for educators (Government of Saskatchewan; Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2018).

### **Statement of Purpose**

The skills necessary to navigate the responsibilities of teaching are changing (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). In addition, the skills introduced during one's B.Ed. degree are often refined in isolation during the early phases of their career (Hellsten, Prytula, Ebanks, & Lai, 2009; Lemisko, Hellsten, & Demchuk-Kosolofski, 2017). As teachers transition to schools they work to meet the goals of the profession, build relationships, and support the myriad needs of their students and themselves; including attending to wellness and self-care practices necessary to mitigate stress and prevent burnout (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000; Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2016; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2014). Given the myriad responsibilities, navigating the early phases of one's career can be difficult and once in the field not all Saskatchewan teachers are guaranteed to receive adequate mentorship. Currently, no government sponsored mentorship programs exist to support teachers in the changing and challenging complexities of the role. In this early phase of teacher transition to work, many are left to seek out guidance and support on their own, which can be seen as professional responsibility. However, this can be difficult given that it requires confidence, competence, and a particular emotional skillset (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000).

Though the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation provides mentorship supports for schools and administrators, mentorship remains a relatively unregulated process of teacher induction to the profession as only 9 out of 29 Saskatchewan school divisions provide any form of formal mentorship support (Kutsyuruba & Treguna, 2014; Lemisko, Hellsten, and Demchuk-

Kosolofski, 2017). Influencing changes at the level of government can be difficult. This study, therefore, analyzes the experiences and practices of thriving teachers in order to define knowledge, skills, and practices that could be developed and shared with other ECTs at the pre-service level, so they may have the confidence and competence to flourish in their career.

### **Problem**

Canadian B.Ed. graduates are well-respected and the institutions that train teachers report they are prepared to provide quality teaching (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017); however, as many as 40% leave the profession in the first five years (Canadian Teacher's Federation, 2014; Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). Research shows patterns of stress and pressure contribute to teacher attrition (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011), which, as compared to other professions, has a relatively higher rate of turnover (Lemisko et al., 2017). By exploring the practices of ECTs who are competent and thriving, this study adds to a growing body of research informing teacher education. The perspectives shared offer insight into the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that may help to strengthen ECTs' resilience and contribute to an area of the literature which previously lacked attention: the perspective of thriving ECTs (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019).

### **Importance of Study**

It has been said that the research into thriving career teachers offers the potential to inform "pre-service preparation for the reality of teachers' work" (Mansfield, Beltman, Broadley, & Weatherby-Fell, 2016, p. 78). Mansfield et al. (2016) found:

An alternative approach to the issue of teacher attrition has been to focus on why teachers remain in the profession, the factors that sustain them, the resources they harness to navigate through challenges, and consequently how they may develop resilience and thrive rather than simply survive in their work. (p. 78)

It has also been stated that one of the greatest single levers “for achieving positive outcomes for students is [an investment] in the quality of teaching” (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2008, p. 3); therefore, research that supports teachers has the potential to improve student learning experiences as well (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005). A study that explores the experiences of thriving ECTs, adds to the literature perspectives that can contribute to teacher retention, resilience, and well-being, at the same time as it contributes to knowledge that may have “significant potential benefits for both teachers and students” (Meiklejohn et al., 2012, p. 291). As novice practitioners, each of the early career teachers in this study were already seen as competent and thriving in their field, sharing perspectives that produced a rich account of the experiences that led to their success. Berliner (1986) stated: “expert teachers are one of the best sources to see and study examples of defensible action, and the knowledge gained from such a study is much more codifiable [and valuable] than many people think” (p. 13).

### **Research Questions**

The research questions guide a study and they should appropriately match methodology (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). In this case study, the questions sought answers to factors that could support the teaching profession. Because the study was designed to learn from the experiences and practices of competent and thriving ECTs in Saskatchewan, the language used by governing authorities in the province contributed to the development of the questions guiding this work: The Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board (SPTRB); The Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation; and the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (see Appendices A, B, & C). The research questions are as follows:

1. What knowledge, skills, or attitudes (competencies) do thriving ECTs possess?

2. How does the development of particular knowledge, skills, or attitudes (competencies) contribute to thriving in the profession of teaching?
3. How has the knowledge, skills, or attitudes (competencies) present in thriving ECTs been attained or refined?

This search for the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that could contribute to a thriving teaching practice involved questions about the conceptual nature of teaching as well. Therefore, sub-questions were developed from three domains first investigated by Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, and Krathwohl (1956) and Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia (1964). The domains were (a) the cognitive domain (the demonstration of competence concerning a knowledge base in the discipline of teaching or pedagogical influence on teaching in various subject areas); (b) the affective domain (the analysis of interpersonal skills and attitudes that can support teaching effectiveness); and (c) the psycho-motor domain (attention to the skills and actions that competent thriving teachers utilize). Sub-questions directed observations, supplemented open-ended interview questions (Appendices I & J), and guided the collection and analysis of the researcher's reflections throughout the study:

- a. How do the ECTs prepare and set up their learning environments (i.e. teach, manage resources, assess)?
- b. How do the ECTs construct pedagogical knowledge or beliefs and use that information to make decisions about their practice?
- c. How do the ECTs manage the classroom (i.e. safety, learning, behaviour, comfort)?
- d. How do the ECTs relate and interact with students and build relationships in the context of their classrooms?

## **Background and Significance**

The topics of teaching and teacher education are close to my heart, as I have been an educator in the province of Saskatchewan for almost twenty years. Throughout the course of my career, I have experienced both challenges and triumphs, and a passion for teaching led me to a desire to support the profession through work in both teacher professional development and pre-service teacher education. The topic of teacher attrition and retention, especially within the early years, speaks to me directly, as I almost left the profession within five minutes of my first day on the job. I begin this section with a personal narrative, reflective of an overwhelming first few minutes in the classroom that led to where I am today.

### **Personal Narrative**

*In the fall of 2002, as a brand-new teacher embarking on one of my first paid positions in a classroom, I excitedly took the call for a day of substitute work. Though I was thoroughly prepared, with my teaching certificate, lesson plans, and even a few years as a pre-school teacher attesting to my readiness, I found myself amidst absolute chaos in a middle-year classroom. The room was loud, the students wanted nothing to do with me, and there was much opposition to the morning plan outlined by the group's regular classroom teacher. Few students would tell me their names and next to none were ready, or willing, to listen to anything I had to say. I employed several strategies to calm the group, none worked, and we became more divided by the minute. The stress in these moments was insurmountable. With my heart pounding, and the sense of losing the group or my mind becoming more of a reality, I considered what would be worse: admitting defeat and calling in reinforcements or walking away from the profession altogether. Looking out the window, I recall seriously contemplating the latter. When I tell this*

*story today, I note that I could literally see myself walking down the path leading away from the school and symbolically away from my career.*

*It was in these moments when a realization dawned on me. In my pre-service training, I had spent time with a mentor teacher who brought me along to a four-day training institute on the topic of Restitution, a model of school discipline based on William Glasser's *Quality Schools* (1969, 1990). The professional development was facilitated by Diane Gossen, an educator and leader in relationship-based school discipline models since the 1980s. This experience was a defining moment in my career, and as I felt myself losing control, I turned to the only thing I thought could save me: relationship. I didn't know these students, and they had no reason to trust in, listen to, or learn from me. The decisions I subsequently made that morning led to the realization that the work and the agenda had less to do with the learning than I had ever thought, and would forever change the path I took as an educator. Those moments of terror, despite all the hard work to get there, taught me how little it took before I was willing to give it all up. Since that time, I have enjoyed a fulfilling, lifelong career, and in my two decades as an educator, I have paid close attention to the strategies that protect me from stress, burnout, and that dreadful desire to walk away.*

I tell this story during workshops, lectures, or even to new teachers lost in the challenges of the work. The particular strengths I used in this moment, and many others over the years that followed in classrooms, helped to take what was inevitable defeat and turn it into an opportunity. I realized I needed to stop pursuing a teacher directed agenda and instead work to connect and build a relationship with the students. I did this through a practice known as Restitution (Gossen, 1998). The basis of this practice posits that teachers and students engage in problem-solving and conflict resolution through a process that involves listening, mutual understanding, and respect.

Restitution honours student-teacher relationships and solutions reflective of everyone’s needs, highlighting that, as a teacher, our role was to “create the conditions for a person to make mistakes, [yet] return to the group strengthened” (Gossen, 1998, p. 183). This overarching premise provided me with the means to navigate some of my toughest days on the job.

From these early beginnings, I went on to spend most of my career working with challenging groups of students, most of whom were struggling or at risk of school failure. Though I faced much adversity along the way, I enjoyed a fulfilling career working in environments from pre-school to higher education, honing practices rooted in relationship and pursuing teaching as a passion. These experiences have shaped who I am as an educator, and they have included teaching in group homes, detention centers, jails, multi-grade classrooms, mental health programs, and special education resource rooms, among many other general education and university classrooms. Given the diverse needs of students, which have grown in intensity over the last twenty years (Orlowski, 2016), the catalyst for this study was curiosity about the practices of others who have persevered despite what sometimes felt like overwhelming odds.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are employed in this study and defined as follows:

1. **Teacher Candidates (TCs) & Pre-Service Teachers:** These interchangeable terms refer to teachers who are currently attending degree programs at a university or institution where they may attain a Bachelor of Education degree. In Saskatchewan, there are two undergraduate programs offered at two universities that consist of four years of combined coursework and school-based student teaching and field experiences.

2. **Teacher Induction to Work:** This is the phase of one's career where teachers go from pre-service teacher candidates to in-service teachers (from students to professionals).
3. **Early Career Teachers (ECTs):** For this study, the teachers are considered to be early in their career if they have been teaching less than five years. Similar terms include beginning teachers (teaching less than three years) and novice teachers (who have been in the profession for less than seven years) (Karsenti & Collin, 2013).
4. **Teacher Competencies & Competence:** In this study, teacher competence is defined as teachers who support and foster safe, well-managed learning environments, as described in the noted provincial documents (see Appendices A, B, & C): Ministry of Education Strategic Plans (2018-2019); Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation Standards of Practice (2018); and The Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board (SPTRB) Teacher Competencies (2020). In Saskatchewan, teacher competencies reflect an array of (a) professional competencies (attitudes & behaviours); (b) knowledge competencies; and (c) instructional competencies which are known as holistic skills, strategies, and practices that support student learning and well-being (SPTRB, 2020).
5. **Quality Teaching:** High performing systems define quality teaching as teaching that considers a variety of domains for growth including cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Quality teaching supports teacher and student well-being and learning, through knowledge acquisition, personal and interpersonal skill development, and collegial sharing and growth (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Quality teachers use conceptual, technical, instructional, and pedagogical skills and practices in their work.
6. **Thriving:** Thriving teachers are those who are coping and managing, given the stress faced in the profession, especially in the early part of their teaching career (Gu & Day,

2007). Thriving teachers are competent and show resilience and growth despite adversity (Beltman, Mansfield, and Price, 2011). In Saskatchewan, thriving teachers uphold provincial goals and standards and work towards growth within outlined domains (Appendices A, B, & C).

7. **Teacher Retention:** This phrase refers to recruiting and retaining teacher candidates long-term within the profession. Many facts affect the retention of teachers from: demands for employment; personal reasons for leaving the profession; incompatibility in the workplace; career changes; lack of support or job dissatisfaction; stress or burnout; and poor performance (Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Weldon, 2018).
8. **Attrition:** This term refers to the rate at which teachers may leave the profession. In some jurisdictions around the world, teacher attrition has been recorded at rates as high as 50% within the first five years (Campbell, Zeichner, Lieberman, & Osmond-Johnson, 2017; Ingersoll, 2003). As with teacher retention, it can be difficult to assess the reasons for teacher attrition; however, attrition rates are cause for concern, especially when they are high (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Attrition rates vary across Canada, with lows reported near 15% - 25% and highs near 40% - 50% (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019); studies frequently cite stress, burnout, and lack of support as factors (Froese-Germain, 2014; Canadian Teacher's Federation, 2014).

### **Summary**

Classrooms are growing extensively in size and complexity, and considerable attention must be paid to research that can support teachers with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to cope, manage, and thrive in their teaching endeavours (Hamre et al., 2013; Oliver & Reschly, 2007; Stough, Montague, Landmark, & Williams-Diehm, 2015). As teachers are

expected to lead, in increasingly diverse and unpredictable environments, where a range of disruptions to the learning can occur (Oliver & Reschly, 2007), the competencies required of them grow more complex. Those who are able, engage cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills that go beyond organizing curriculum and managing academics (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011). Competency in the discipline requires strength, resilience, awareness, and an attention to mitigating student needs amongst the nuances of the space (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Dewey, 1904; Oliver & Reschly, 2007; O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012; Yoon, 2002).

In the chapters that follow, the literature review surveys the historical, social, emotional, and political contexts that impact classrooms. Increasing class sizes, mental health concerns, and behavioural anomalies, all of which affect the changing needs and required skill sets of educators, are presented as they contribute to the array of competencies teachers must now possess (Dobbs-Oates & Wachter Morris, 2016; Pachauri & Yadav, 2014). Chapter Three explores theoretical and methodological considerations, while Chapter Four presents the experiences and attitudes of four thriving Saskatchewan educators. The fifth, and final chapter, recommends domains for future development, based on the teacher's strengths, which have the potential to enrich the discipline of teaching. Experiential and course-based considerations for teacher education are then made.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

The literature review takes the reader on a journey through the landscape of teaching over the last one hundred years, providing perspectives on the learner, the classroom, and the needs of twenty-first century educators. This review includes historical and political contexts; issues of school safety and reform; and curricula and classroom implications for present day teachers and students. Teacher education, with an emphasis on social and emotional skill development, is also examined, to support an understanding of the holistic requirements of the profession. These requirements are described by educational documents in the province of Saskatchewan as competencies (Appendices A, B, & C). Since this study explores the lives of four early career teachers (ECTs) who were selected for having established safe, well-managed learning environments and thriving in their career, despite the challenges facing them and their ECT-peers, the literature review points to relative areas for discussion which highlight knowledge, skills, and attitudes that may contribute to strength and resilience in teaching.

Potential gaps around the development of skills and supports at the pre-service to early in-service level are explored later in this review. Though teacher preparation programs provide thorough training, the changing needs of twenty-first century classrooms have created complexities that require explicit preparation in some areas. Gaps in preparedness have contributed to what many call *a theory to practice gap* in teacher training and induction to the profession (Allen, 2009; McDonough, 2012; Stough et al., 2015). Understanding the needs and experiences of thriving educators can support areas for development in confidence and competence, and results may be used to support and retain quality teachers in the twenty-first century.

## **Influences in Education**

In this section, psychological influences are explored first, followed by social and political contributions to the discipline of teaching. Teaching in the twenty-first century has become an increasingly sophisticated and complex endeavour. The demands of the profession involve a mix of dynamics that includes personal, psychological, and pedagogical factors contributing to the day-to-day experience in the lives of students and teachers (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Over the last century, both scientific advancements, and a myriad of other factors, including the understanding of teaching from the perspectives of human development; behaviour and learning needs; and, more recently, the influence of social, emotional, and cultural influences on classrooms and curricula, have all informed teaching (Lawrence-Brown & Sapon-Shevin, 2015). In addition, societal changes in each decade since the turn of the twentieth century have impacted schooling. As a result, major reforms and policy changes happened in the latter half of the century (Sugai et al., 2002).

The preparation for teaching, once rooted in theoretical models of learning, motivation, and behaviour, has evolved to reflect the need for current and more complex knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the ever-changing terrain, with constant advancements that impact students and teachers in the classroom (Bandura, 1993; Bassett & Mattar, 2017; Gable, Hendrickson, Tonelson, & Acker, 2000; Wilson, Gutkin, Hagen, & Oats, 1998). The most recent developments, in the areas of mental health and neuro-science, have impacted modern understandings of learning, behaviour, and management of people in diverse contexts (Bassett & Mattar, 2017; Carew & Magsamen, 2010; Maloney, Lawlor, Schonert-Reichl, & Whitehead, 2016). Challenges related to these disciplines have not gone unnoticed by educators who may require changes to their preparation and training programs as a result.

## **Theoretical Influences: Psychology**

Early in the last century, many psychological, sociological, and philosophical explorations contributed to evolving theories around learning and behaviour. Dewey (1900) once stated that school practice “has a definite psychological basis”, indicating that teachers are “possessed by specific psychological assumptions which control their theory and their practice” (p. 106). Many of these assumptions have their roots in behavioural models, which reflect motivation as a key component in learning. As these models evolved from the study of psychology and human development to inform the study and practice of teaching today, they contributed greatly to how teachers understood learning and other student needs. Behaviourism, constructivism, and later developmental and neuro-sequential models are reviewed, as each influenced education through a psychological and somewhat scientific lens. These perspectives have distinct theoretical differences which provide background for the various domains existent in the practice of teaching: management, behaviour, and the contemporary learning needs of students and teachers, including social-emotional learning and other factors that impact the twenty-first century classroom. In addition to being foundations for teaching practice, constructivism and social constructivism support the theoretical orientation of this work, and therefore, also serve as foundations for methodology in the next chapter.

### ***Behaviourism***

Behaviourism has been described as a branch of psychology that focuses on a person’s observable behaviours as they interact within a particular environment (Abramson, 2013). Behavioural psychology, one of the oldest contributors to early learning theories, was highly influenced by Pavlov (1849 – 1936), who explored stimulus-response and classical conditioning as being modifiers to behaviour through the Conditioned-Response Theory (1941).

Behaviourism was also later explored by Watson (1878 – 1958), who was considered a founder of behaviour theory, followed by Skinner (1904 – 1990), who developed and influenced both operant conditioning and the idea that what comes directly before or after a specific behaviour is what influences the behaviour itself, i.e. reinforcement theory and classical conditioning. These approaches offer an interesting contribution to the understanding of why humans behave the way they do, rooted in the knowledge of complex, primitive elements of human behaviour and brain function.

Evidence in support of behaviourism as a model to inform human action posits that external rewards act as major contributing factors to motivate behaviour, and that rewards can come before or after an event to influence action or change. Many school-based management models in use today are based on the psychology of behaviourism. Some examples of these models are Applied Behaviour Analysis, ABA; Functional Behaviour Assessments, FBA; and Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports, PBIS. These models are often rewards-and-consequence based, as teachers and students in these systems must pay attention to motivational stimuli in the school environment and act accordingly to increase or extinguish certain behaviours (Sugai et al., 2002).

### ***Constructivism***

Constructivism, often recognized as the opposite of behaviourism, has been explored at great length by theorists from many disciplines: Vygotsky, a sociologist (1896 – 1934); Piaget, a psychologist (1896 – 1980); and Dewey, a philosopher and educator (1859 – 1952).

Constructivists share the understanding that human behaviour is something that evolves and grows in relationship to experiences and interactions among individuals, and constructivists look to how meaning can be made or how learning can occur as a result of everyday experiences

(Dewey & Dworkin, 1959). Dewey was one of the first educational philosophers in the twentieth century to reference these experiential and social aspects of learning and growth, which existed in sharp contrast to the applied behaviour approaches of the time.

Dewey (1904) felt that under the guidance and supervision of adults, and with expert teaching, young people could gain the skills and confidence to change their behaviour in a way that had deeper meaning, and was beyond pre-conditioned or rewarded responses. Dewey was highly influenced by philosophy and those who studied education from a philosophical lens, including Locke (1632 – 1704) and Rousseau (1712 – 1778). Philosophically, Dewey believed that teaching and learning were developmental and constructivist in nature. He proposed that learning involved a deeper understanding of the mind and the inner workings of relational and experiential influences on changes to one's behaviour or actions (1933). Like Piaget (1936), Dewey felt that learning and growth were a result of an active-constructive process, verses being passive and receptive; which Dewey noted as one of his criticisms of traditional education (1933).

Constructivism formed the basis of social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which is the theoretical lens that serves as the framework for this case study. Social constructivism posits that “knowledge is constructed rather than discovered” (Stake, 1995, p. 99), and that growth takes place through narrative constructions of self and other in social contexts (Bandura, 1999; Bruner, 1991). With this view in mind, the construction of themes as a result of thematic analysis relies on both the participants' viewpoints and the perspective of the researcher. Social constructivism has connections to other social and cognitive learning theories including, Bruner's (1991) understanding of social learning through narrative interactions (learning as an active social process) and Bandura's (1999) Social Cognitive Learning Theory (learning as an

active constructive process). Throughout the twentieth century, these theories have informed teaching pedagogy and learning models that are still in use today. Social constructivism as a theoretical framework for data collection and analysis in this work is explored at length in Chapter Three.

### ***Developmental Psychology***

Exciting discoveries in science and psychology over the last half-century have offered developmental views of human behaviour that understand growth and change through the connectedness and attachments among people as they relate, grow, and develop (Hamre et al., 2013). These relational aspects of learning and behaviour can impact teaching through an understanding of the profound considerations of the social, emotional, and physical elements of learning (Elias, 2006). Developmental theories recognize that environments and relationships play a large role in teaching and learning, and developmental models respect the different domains (cognitive, affective, psycho-motor) within the spectrum of a person's behaviour. These theories support a holistic understanding of the brain, mind, and body connection as people learn and grow (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Developmental theories can be seen in many works: Bloom (1956), who acknowledged the importance of holistic cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development of skills in relational contexts; Glasser (1969, 1990), and his development of Quality Schools utilizing Choice Theory and Reality Therapy; and Gossen (1992, 1998), with her Restitution-based model of school-wide and classroom-based management systems. These models emerged in the latter half of the last century, challenging traditional behavioural models in support of more relational-based school discipline. As science, psychology, and philosophy continue to evolve, connectedness, relationships, and other

interrelated facets of experience and human development become increasingly important in teaching and learning models of the twenty-first century (Cornelius-White, 2007).

### *Contributions from Neuro-Science*

Recent advances in neuro-science have shaped twenty-first century understandings of teaching, learning, and behaviour to a great extent. Neuro-science has revealed both the developmental and plastic nature of the brain as it wires in stages to support learning and growth (Perry, 2013, 2017). This knowledge highlights the crucial role educators play in both shaping the learning and impacting the lives of students. Studies around brain development show that humans move through various stages as they grow from infancy to adulthood. The practice of teaching has benefitted from this research, which highlights the importance of a caring and nurturing learning environment versus one which may perpetuate the effects of potential trauma or neglect in a student's life at home (Perry, 2013, 2017).

With a growing understanding of the impact of adverse childhood experiences (Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, ACES) (Cavanaugh, 2016), teachers can mitigate some of the experiences of trauma by utilizing neuroscience-based practices that calm the nervous system (Maloney et al., 2016). Neuro-informed teaching can support all students; however, it is especially beneficial for those with social-emotional learning needs or attachment needs as a result of their adverse life experiences outside of school (Cavanaugh, 2016). Today, empirical evidence exists that links psycho-social and physiological elements of teaching practice to student achievement and behaviour management. In addition, the ability of teachers to maintain calm can have a large impact on learning (Ansari & Coch, 2006; Carew & Magsamen, 2010; Dorman, 2015; Perry, 2013).

One model informed by neuroscience is Bruce Perry's Neuro-sequential Model in Education (NME). Recently, NME has been explored as a standard in planning for general and special education supports for students in various western Canadian classrooms (Perry & Szalavitz, 2007). In 2013, Perry spoke at a Saskatchewan conference for educators and health care workers. As a result, shifts in the practices used in classrooms to support struggling students have occurred. One area of special programming that serves students with academic, behavioural, and social-emotional needs in a Saskatoon school division was restructured in recent years to reflect the developmental and physiological needs of students, based on NME (Perry, 2013). Students in these programs receive their schooling in environments that are isolated from their regular classrooms, and the NME model guides all aspects of learning through reflective, needs-centered, and developmentally sensitive approaches to teaching (Saskatoon Public Schools, 2019).

### **Social and Political Influences**

Increasing diversity as well as social and political movements which aim to respect the needs and rights of children in school settings have resulted in many changes over the last half century to the context of general education classrooms. Today, schools are places where children of varying needs, experiences, abilities, and languages congregate for learning in grade-alike groupings; sometimes, the resulting pressures of these dynamics can impact teachers' and students' success in the school environment (Cameron & Cook, 2007; Jahnukainen, 2011; Rodgers et al., 2014). Over the last several decades, the classroom has shifted from a place where the relative needs of a homogenous group of students were met to an environment with much more heterogeneity and complexity. A brief look at the history of some of the influential aspects

in the evolution of schools may help to situate the current realities for teachers, and their professional practice, in Canadian and Saskatchewan contexts.

### ***Inclusive Education***

In an effort to serve all students in a way that is mindful of social and cultural values, inclusive education (IE) became the expected standard globally (Specht & Young, 2010). As binding statements of policy were enacted over the last 35 years, governments endorsed IE internationally through various actions, including the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, 1994); the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002); and the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA, 2004). Though Canada has its own unique and diverse cultural context, Canadian school policies tend to rely on reform practices from either its closest neighbours, the United States, or other high-performing political and social movements throughout the world (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Majhanovich, 2008). Inclusive practices consider the needs of students by allowing all, regardless of need, to learn in schools and classrooms of their choice; however, IE contributes to an environment where teachers must be ready to manage a number of diverse needs (Lawrence-Brown, 2014, 2015).

In the 1980s, following the lead of the United States, IE began to appear in a Canadian context. Honourably driven by equality and social justice movements, government mandates placed increased responsibility and pressure on general classroom teachers, through IE, to service students who formerly would have received specialized programming in separate special education schools or programs (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA). At the time, these IE policies were referred to as “the most sweeping reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education system since it was enacted in 1965” (U.S. Department of Education,

2001). With good intention, events set in motion large-scale initiatives that merged special and general education classrooms to honour the rights of children and families to attend schools of their choice. These initiatives began to change school dynamics, forever impacting the skills required of teachers to meet the changing needs of the diverse students in their classrooms.

Changes to IE and other policies for Canadian students with exceptionalities initially resulted from the ratification of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982)*. A continued push for a joint ratification by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities followed (UN-CRPD, 2006). By March of 2010, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities signed the convention and endorsed what was an already global policy on IE. This policy has been generally accepted as best practice for children and youth across Canada over the last decade (McCrimmon, 2015). Canadian schools exist within one of the only education systems globally that is not federally mandated; therefore, provincial and district policies differ with regards to IE across the country. When it comes to provincial or jurisdictional implementation of IE practices, including supports for teacher education and professional development, the messages and implementation of inclusion remain inconsistent (Bunch, 2015).

Of historical significance in Canada, and as a result of section 93 under Canadian Educational Provisions set within the *Constitution Act (1867)*, provinces were given almost complete control over education. With this autonomy, teacher federations in each province and territory became divided in their views, as “the blueprint for inclusion was seen as conflicting with the hard realities of the classroom” (Winzer & Mazurek, 2011, p. 7). When it comes to IE today, “the script for education reform is accountability, quality, competence, and efficiency” (Winzer & Mazurek, 2011, p. 17), and teachers are expected to have the skills necessary to meet the diverse needs presented in their classrooms. Estimates of the number of students with special

education needs being serviced in general education settings range anywhere from 9% to 50%, depending on the definition of disability, behavioural needs, or range of language or learning needs (Breslau, Breslau, Miller, & Raykov, 2011; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Freeman, King, Pickett, Craig, Elgar, & Klinger, 2011; Specht et al., 2016). If you add trauma related needs to the range of students requiring adaptations or special accommodations (with regards to behaviour, social-emotional needs, mental health, or learning needs), the numbers can be as high as 30% to 85% (American Psychological Association, 2008).

Different interpretations around what *is* and *is not* considered IE also vary across jurisdictions. Some argue that inclusion is “a fundamental way of seeing and responding to human difference for the benefit of everyone involved” and that it is not “primarily a special education, or even an education, issue” (Lawrence-Brown, 2014, p. 4). In Saskatchewan, the language around IE policy remains clear; however, there exists room for interpretation. Therefore, implementation of IE varies from segregated practices to fully inclusive school environments (Thompson & Timmons, 2017). The province’s Ministry of Education communicates its commitment to inclusion through language that plays an advisory role, encouraging (instead of mandating) inclusive practice. However, actualization of IE is left to individual school divisions. Because of the inconsistencies that come with a haphazard implementation practice, actualization of IE can create confusion or interrupt how TCs access educational resources, while in training for what are diverse classroom settings.

Contemporary concerns around IE stem from confusing messages and the degree to which the provinces enforce and reinforce inclusion in schools (Bunch, 2015); therefore, increasing stress for under-prepared educators (Cameron & Cook, 2007). Though educators in Canadian school systems welcome inclusion and diversity in their general education classrooms,

the need for increased coursework, training, and support is necessary for IE to work and for all to manage and benefit (Cameron & Cook, 2007). Carr (2016) stated the following:

While there is a demonstrable willingness on the part of classroom teachers to include students with diverse learning needs in their classrooms, real concerns from teachers remain over lack of training, clear policy directives, classroom management issues, collaboration and support from specialists, as well as a perceived lack of support and resources. (p. 22)

In Saskatchewan, pre-service teachers are educated as generalists who support the needs of many diverse groups of students. As a result, TCs in Saskatchewan must take at least one course in inclusive education and anywhere from two to five additional courses in psychology, during their B.Ed. degree. Upon graduation, ECTs have the option to attain accreditation through the Certificate for Teaching of English as a Second Language program (CERTESL) and Special Education certification programs. These programs, however, are only offered post-degree. For Saskatchewan educators, this model means that a general classroom teacher enters a multi-dimensional classroom with minimal exposure to English as an Additional Language (EAL) supports and special education tools and concepts.

The provisions around IE have been in place in Canadian schools for almost three decades, and they have placed students with varying language or cultural needs, disabilities or disorders requiring support, behaviour challenges, or mental health concerns in general education contexts for quite some time. Though programs that support the very intensive needs of some of these students exist, many do not meet the provisions of inclusion or the needs of students through aligned teacher training programs. Inclusive education has impacted the requirements of all educators in Canada, and the varying degree of skill sets needed can place increased stress on

new teachers, who can be inexperienced and underprepared for their role (Rodgers et al., 2014; Winzer & Mazurek, 2011).

### ***School Safety and Reform***

In the wake of one tragic school shooting (Columbine High School, Colorado, U.S., 1999), and other school-related incidents of violence, risk management has become increasingly important for supporting students and teachers. Protecting schools as safe places to teach and learn are key considerations in North America today. Safety needs and policies have evolved, which prompted large-scale movements of reform. Near the close of the twentieth century, factors that affected education and management of student behaviours revolved directly around safety in schools (Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000). In the U.S., government sponsored research encouraged approaches rooted in applied behaviour analysis (ABA) to support schools to implement zero tolerance policies; these measures enforced consequences for non-compliance, and kept students safe and on track (Evertson & Weinstein, 2013; Mitchell, 2014).

The rise in violence, which includes an increase in drug use, bullying, and school shootings, led to federal action and the need to respond to an overall drastic change in violent acts happening within schools (Evertson & Weinstein, 2013). Reactionary and precautionary intervention measures towards school violence (rooted in behaviour models) worked at times in contrast to the social-emotional needs of students. In some school environments, safety needs prompted a decrease in the use of developmental or constructivist approaches that had been prevailing in previous decades (Evertson & Weinstein, 2013). What was seen as school transformation, during this period of reform, was a “crack down” on violence through “zero-tolerance policies” (Mitchell, 2014, p. 291). These policies, though charged with enforcing school safety, led to a return to behaviour-based systems, which used positive or negative

consequences (rewards or withdrawal of rewards) and punitive measures of discipline (Sugai et al., 2000). Practices, which included office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions, were extreme exercises used often in discipline-based models. Put in place to rid schools of troublesome youth, these models did little to decrease behaviour problems or increase safety in schools (Evertson & Weinstein, 2013).

What was evident while moving into the twenty-first century was the impact of an overemphasis on behaviour models, which perpetuated segregating students and disempowering teachers (Mitchell, 2014). In Canada (and Saskatchewan), many educators took crisis intervention training. This training was seen, in some American states, to be necessitated by IDEA and the increase in violence in schools (Couvillon, Peterson, Ryan, Scheuermann, & Stegall, 2010). Controversial in nature, crisis prevention and intervention training are largely based on seclusion and restraint in times of crisis, and are not necessarily best practice strategies for students. Though data on the use of these practices can be difficult to attain, it is known that some schools continue to utilize restraints when there are fears or risks of violence (Ryan & Peterson, 2004).

Many schools have realized the detriment when using approaches that respond to crisis through intervention, and they have purported other ways to employ safety practices in schools; this includes remaining supportive of the need to decrease violent acts (Peterson, Ryan, & Rozalski, 2013). Some examples exist in schools in western Canada, where organizations adopted de-escalation policies and began training teachers to understand stress and conflict management, which prompted a return to models of care (Peterson, Ryan, & Rozalski, 2013). These models utilized prevention, intervention, and planning that put students' needs first over

discipline (U.S. Department of Education, 2018), and planned to mitigate versus intervening in crisis.

### ***Tiered Educational Models***

With the return to more inclusive, holistic, and community-based practices, two related models used to guide positive behaviour and support learning emerged in schools: (a) Response to Intervention (RTI Model) and (b) Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS in response to RTI). Both models support positive practices in prevention and intervention and dominate the literature today. Each model is rooted in a three-tiered approach, often utilized in public health, and aims to support students through its various levels of care. The tiers support changes to the intervention in relation to one's needs, as they move through the tiers receiving more individualized supports (Horner, 2014; Reinke et al., 2014). Within a tiered system, classroom management, behaviour, and academic supports are implemented with varying degrees of success, dependent on a multitude of factors, mostly related to student need (Reinke, Herman, Stormont, Newcomer, & David, 2013). Classroom environments within tiered models are designed to universally support most students (Universal Design for Learning, UDL) with individualized accommodations or adaptations. These supports are infused into lessons and the classroom space as differentiated instructional choices (DI), or they involve complete modifications to grade expected programming, requiring pull-out programming as a last resort for individuals with high needs.

The early work of Sugai and Horner (2002) in RTI and PBIS laid a foundation for overarching trends to support interventions that required data collection. In order to track and support students, behaviour models rooted in applied behaviour analysis (ABA) became popular for assessing student need and programming interventions at all levels. These ABA models were

meant to uphold practices that provide school wide supports and focus on positive versus punitive measures. These models promote prevention first over intervention, and they suggest positive rewards over isolating disciplinary methods. The only concerns are that ABA utilizes data driven practices and assessment of measurable outcomes that must be tracked by teachers to influence student success (Sugai & Horner, 2002). The downsides of these tiered approaches to classroom management are that they require teachers to monitor students and record data in multiple areas to assess needs and apply for supports. This puts increased pressure on educators to track, monitor, and change their practices to meet a multitude of social, emotional, learning, and health-related needs within their classrooms in addition to the regular expectations of the academic environment.

In a review of the preparation necessary for teaching, over 100 years ago, Dewey (1904) made reference to the particular psychological insights necessary to understand and support foundations of practice as they relate to management, communication, relationship, order, and learning. Dewey noted that what students needed at any given moment was to move forward “effectively and healthfully” (p. 8) with the support of their teachers, which suggests that educators be purposeful, thoughtful, and even mindful in order to assess and understand the nuances of teaching and learning given the holistic needs of people in the space (1904). Today, the demands on teachers are high, as classrooms are more diverse than they have ever been. Preparedness for the twenty-first century classroom requires a great deal of consideration concerning the pros and cons from where we have come to the goals of where we have yet to go (Belcher, 1997).

## **Twenty-First Century Classrooms**

Over the last several decades, many shifts in the landscape of education have transformed classrooms into increasingly diverse spaces where all learners are accepted and supported (McCrimmon, 2015). These shifts have brought with them pros and cons for both students and teachers. Though most educators would agree inclusion offers the best scenario for all students, it has limitations if educators are not supported with the resources to successfully implement practices that assist students with their diverse needs. The increase in IE practices has meant that the cultural, behavioural, mental health, and academic needs increase in general classrooms (Andrews, McCabe, & Wideman-Johnston, 2014; Sun & Shek, 2012). Teachers are tasked with the responsibility to support this diversity while ensuring students feel included and welcomed at school. Next, in the context of teachers needs, the demands placed on teachers in twenty-first century classrooms are reviewed (Hong, 2010; Hutchinson, 2019), as they relate to meeting the changing and complex needs of students today.

### **Classroom Management**

Today's classrooms are complex, and management within them can be equally intricate. With many factors at play, the success of the school day depends on the teacher's ability to instruct and manage while providing safety, comfort, and diverse learning opportunities for all. Each teacher may have a unique way of dealing with management issues and student concerns, and his or her skill set can be based on personal experience, educational pursuits, personal and professional development, and even their ability to manage and regulate emotions (Konti, 2011). These skills reflect qualities that everyone has the ability to refine and grow if they approach their personal and professional endeavours with an open mind and a willingness to face the excitement, along with the challenges teaching presents (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011).

An abundance of literature cites classroom management as an entity unto itself in teaching pedagogy, and yet, it continues to exist as a problem area for educators early in their careers (Melnick & Meister, 2008). Upon a review of the current literature, one Canadian university sponsored research around classroom management in pre-service and in-service teacher training (Edmunds, 2013). This research concluded that “effective classroom management approaches are in great demand as there exists ample research evidence” of student behaviour as a major concern for classroom management (p. 1). Three points highlighted by Edmunds include the following:

1. Student misbehaviour is one of the most serious problems facing schools.
2. No other educational factor undermines student learning and achievement as much as poorly managed classrooms and the problematic behaviours that result from students feeling disconnected.
3. Classroom management problems are the major cause of teacher burnout and job dissatisfaction—teachers repeatedly rank discipline as the first or second most serious problem they face in schools. (Edmunds, 2013, p. 1).

In Stough et al. (2015), teachers were surveyed, and as behavioural needs were on the rise “one-hundred percent of the sample believed that both special educators and general educators would benefit from training in classroom management or behavioural interventions” (p. 43). These findings are consistent with those from another survey, where over 95% of teachers, pre-service and experienced, responded that “all pre-service teachers – including special education majors and general education majors – should receive [explicit] training in classroom management and behaviour management” to support teacher health, well-being, and resilience (MacPherson-Court, McDonald, & Sobsey, 2003; cited in Stough et al., p. 43).

## ***Behavioural Needs***

In 2012, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the U.S. reported that 34% of teachers cited problem behaviour as interfering with instruction and noted it to be the number one reason for teachers leaving the profession (Aud et al., 2012). Many investigations over the last decade reference teachers who generally feel unprepared for managing the challenging needs of a classroom; they feel unable to support behavioural needs, manage student mental health, or meet the diverse academic and language needs of students (Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016; Freeman, Simonsen, Briere, & MacSuga-Gage, 2014; Karsenti & Collin 2013). Butler and Monda-Amaya (2016) stated the following:

Teachers must have a good understanding of classroom management, behaviour management, and specific challenges when they occur. Questions often arise as to how well teachers are prepared to manage the overall structure of the classroom and implement behaviour management strategies. Preparation in how to manage challenging behaviour is a serious concern, particularly the extent to which teachers know how to (a) examine the function of the behaviour, (b) develop appropriate interventions for children displaying those behaviours, and (c) understand their own role in the escalation or de-escalation of the behaviours. (p. 277)

Teachers report feeling ill prepared to deal with management issues and behaviour problems (Karsenti & Collin, 2013), despite the fact that a brief analysis of North American Teacher Federation materials and school division handouts show access to various management and behaviour supports. According to all ten provincial government websites, which include links to available professional development supplements, much information can be found to guide educators in support of mental health needs with regards to the following: knowledge

about trauma or compassion informed care; differentiation for diverse learning needs; as well as guidance with respect to English as an Additional Language (EAL), and other language or cultural learning needs. In addition to academic tools, other supports include personal wellness strategies, classroom management, and behavioural supports; however, teachers must seek out this information and process or implement it on their own.

### ***Social-Emotional Learning Needs***

In 2013, Canadian research regarding the number of children dealing with social, emotional, and behavioural challenges that can hinder their success in school and life, supported by The Max Bell and Carthy Foundations in Alberta, presented literature around social and emotional learning and the social, emotional, and behavioural challenges of young people. Their results were based on a widely conducted review of the literature (Breslau et al., 2011; Freeman et al., 2011), and they noted the following:

Among grade 6 students in Canada in 2010, 27% of girls and 30% of boys, as well as 45% of girls and 48% of boys in grade 10 reported high levels of behavioural problems, such as cutting classes, getting into fights, talking back to teachers, and making other people do what they want. In controlling for other factors, behavioural problems at ages 6 and 11 have been shown to predict lower math and reading test scores at age 17, probably because bad behaviour impedes the acquisition of cognitive skills that are the foundation for learning. (p. 2)

Studies like this shed light on the need for supporting teachers with education focused on root causes to learning and social-emotional concerns, as they may help teachers to understand mechanisms for behavioural and emotional supports.

Noting that teaching is an “intensely psychological process” (Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004, p. 322), one study from an urban district in the North-Eastern U.S. looked at 69 teachers and their use of Responsive Classrooms (RC) to support efficacy in practice. RC is an approach that considers the social-emotional needs of teaching with a focus on building relationships in the first six weeks of school. RC asserts that teachers who receive instruction and professional development in programs that support the development of relationships find a greater degree of success in the classroom. They concluded that positive relationships support efficacy, lower stress, and decrease behaviour problems. Other studies highlight the importance of teacher motivation and education in achieving efficacy in practice through building resilience and strength for a lasting career (Ashton & Webb 1986; Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2013).

Jennings and Greenberg (2009), who reviewed a large body of research on teachers’ social and emotional competence, concluded that the ability of the teacher to engage on an emotional level has a major impact on the climate of the classroom, including the teacher’s ability to do his or her job, manage behaviour, and support students’ academic learning. Jennings and Greenberg also found a common denominator throughout several studies, in that teachers must be effective problem solvers and masters at building relationships that foster insight into their own needs as well as the needs of their students (2009). Other literature has gone so far as to contend that teaching is an “emotional labour” and that “strategic planning, cognitive leadership, problem-solving, teacher reflection, higher-order thinking, and standards-based reforms” (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 279) must be backed with the soft skills needed by teachers to impart resilience and support positive teacher student relationships (Pachauri & Yadav, 2014).

## **Mental Health**

Considering that approximately one in five North Americans exhibits mental health concerns before age 16, the significance of mental health concerns in classrooms has been cited as being of primary importance in the literature in support of teacher practice (Andrews, McCabe, & Wideman-Johnston, 2014; Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011; Rodgers et al., 2014). Addressing misconceptions when it comes to understanding mental health is a priority, as is terminology that can negate illness or wellness and affect one's ability to cope and manage. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, Constitution section, para. 2, 1948). This definition has not changed in over 70 years and speaks to the holistic nature of health in general as being a state of overall wellness. A more contemporary definition, from The Government of Canada (2019), is as follows:

Mental health is the state of your psychological and emotional well-being. It does not mean the same thing as mental illness. However, poor mental health can lead to mental and physical illness. Good mental health allows you to feel, think and act in ways that help you enjoy life and cope with its challenges. (para. 2)

Other general information speaks to mental health as being the state of "how we think, feel, and act [and] it helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, para. 1, 2018). One way to frame mental health can be to think of it as a state of being that can fluctuate on a continuum, from illness to wellness, depending on internal and external factors in one's life at any given point in time. Mental health matters at every stage of a person's life as people navigate factors that contribute to ill or well health, regardless of age, race, culture, gender, or sexual orientation (U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Research shows that as many as 20% of young people struggle with mental health concerns (illness), and these concerns can manifest in classrooms in various ways (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2014).

In a review of relevant literature, much of the research around classroom management and teacher stress reported behaviour and mental health concerns as vital factors in the disruption of learning in the classroom (Sun & Shek, 2012). Knowledge and understanding can inform teaching, organization, and management choices, and though students should never be defined based on diagnoses, it remains important for educators to be informed about the diverse needs students present, including those related to mental health diagnoses. Mental health and behavioural disorders involve several categories for consideration when it comes to behaviour management (Adelman & Taylor, 1993; American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Ben-Sasson, Carter, & Briggs-Gowan, 2009; Martin, 2016):

- Conduct disorders (CD).
- Autism spectrum disorders (ASD), which now include a wide variety of diagnosable disorders: ADHD, autistic disorder, Asperger's disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, pervasive developmental disorder (PDD), and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD).
- Emotional behavioural disorders (EBD), which includes depression and anxiety, among other mood disorders.
- A variety of learning disabilities (LD).
- Sensory processing disorders, sensory modulation disorders, and sensory over responsivity disorders where self-regulation skills are needed.

These health and behavioural needs present in different ways in classrooms, and they involve either overt (visible / disruptive) or covert (more hidden) expressions of need. Whether diagnosed or not, students can exhibit challenging or worrisome behaviour at any point in time and if underlying (covert), these needs may go undetected and unsupported. Many pre-service teacher education programs do not explicitly teach, or explore at length, mental health as it relates to students or teachers (Rodgers et al., 2014). Targeted coursework in this area may provide teachers with opportunities to gain valuable mental health knowledge and skills to support a variety of student needs or concerns. In turn, this coursework may contribute to teachers well-being practices. Being informed can alleviate frustration and undue stress. Rodgers et al. (2014) commented on these issues:

Teachers today often express concern over having to support students with mental health issues in spite of the fact that they lack training in this area . . . especially in the area of whole health and mental health, [which] is underscored by research which suggests that the more preparation teachers receive, the more efficacy and success they will achieve with their students (see Darling-Hammond, 2000). Not only does adequate and appropriate training help individuals feel more competent in their profession, but also the education they receive works to change their personal epistemologies, beliefs, and attitudes toward a given topic. (p. 15)

Though much evidence points to the necessity for increased mental health supports in schools, there are mental health practitioners who do not support teacher education in this discipline. Ott, Hibbert, Rodger, and Leschied (2017) shared the following in relation to a teachers role:

The Chair in Adolescent Mental Health is responding to the call from educators for more knowledge on how to address student mental health concerns . . . in order to address role confusion this program of research should consider the implications of health interventions in schools. Language that confuses school with health care settings should be avoided; although educators want more time to care, their profession prepares them to teach, not triage. (pp. 18–19)

Although it remains important to distinguish teachers from mental health practitioners, teachers inevitably work with young people for hours every day and they are therefore faced with the challenges of managing and supporting the mental wellness and behaviour needs of their students, with or without the core knowledge that supports it. Given these responsibilities and the complex needs of students, explicit mental health training can support teacher confidence and competence in their role (Kutcher et al., 2016b).

### ***Trauma Informed Practice***

Trauma informed and compassion informed approaches have become increasingly important among educators who wish to support their students to be successful in school (Steele, 2017). In addition to the noted 20% of students with mental health concerns as a factor that impacts classroom learning and behaviour, many students come to school affected by traumatic events or socio-economic factors that impact their health and ability to cope with stress (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2014). Trauma and tumultuous life events can disrupt learning, health, and secure attachments, consequently influencing areas of development that are expected and supported in schools. The American Psychological Association (APA) suggests “it is more common than not for children and adolescents to be exposed to more than a single

traumatic event” (American Psychological Association, 2008, para. 5), and the APA also indicates that childhood exposure to trauma can range from 30% to 85% in some communities.

There are preventative actions teachers can take to mitigate experiences and expressions of stress for students. These actions include considerations in the physical environment, such as lighting or physical organization of the room and materials, in addition to using structured routines throughout the day and consistent, predictable classroom management (Hutchinson, 2019). Teachers who understand trauma, and that students may experience concealed health or lifestyle challenges, may have empathy for certain behaviours exhibited in school. They may also change their approaches to teaching, organization, and management to strengthen a student’s capacity for resilience and their own capacity to manage presenting behaviours (Perry, 2013). Tone and approach are among some of the considerations that can have an impact on teacher-student relationships and social-emotional learning when trauma is a factor, as a loud or condescending tone can trigger maladaptive student behaviour (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011; Yoon, 2002). Being brief and neutral with expectations and requests also helps. Nuances exist in the practice that inherently support a trauma informed approach, and these are increasingly essential elements of teacher training in the twenty-first century (Cavanaugh, 2016). Being trauma informed is not complicated, it simply means being considerate of general practices that impart kindness and caring with respect to other’s needs; trauma informed is human informed.

In the spring of 2020, a global pandemic completely changed the face of the classroom as teachers and students moved to remote learning around the world. Miller (2020) referred to this event as “the loss and trauma event of our time” (p. 1). The pandemic effect, classified as a traumatic event that, at the time of writing this, continues to impact the entire globe, will have an

impact on students, families, educators, and teacher candidates (TCs), who have all made transitions that disrupted connectedness and overall health. Miller (2020) stated the following:

Psychologists have long found that those at greatest risk for psychopathology and more serious psychological symptoms tend to be those who were more likely to have such symptoms before a given loss or trauma event (Wortman & Silver, 1989). We already know that those with pre-existing psychological problems, such as anxiety, are already facing difficulties in adjusting to the realities and fears of the pandemic. (p. 4)

Teachers moving into classrooms as the world adjusts to potentially new and ever-changing learning environments will need some training, as they will be among those who spend the most time supporting young people to learn coping skills. Teachers who can manage the strain and stress on the profession and themselves will be in a better position to support students to reframe stress, find meaning amongst chaos or challenges, and cope (Miller, 2020).

### ***Impact of Stress***

The stress of teaching remains an undeniable fact of the profession and research from around the world cites teaching as being one of the most stressful of all occupations (Johnson, Cooper, Cartwright, Donald, Taylor, & Millet, 2005). As many as two thirds of educators consider their profession highly stressful (Harvey & Spinney, 2000; Jepson & Forrest 2006); and many see teaching as a profession that impacts daily life, sleep habits, relationships outside of school, and mental health. As previously discussed, and due to increasing stress and pressure in schools, many ECTs leave the profession during their first five years. Gliebe (2018) noted the following on this phenomenon:

The prevalence of stress among teachers threatens their well-being, resulting in physical, emotional and mental exhaustion [including] high levels of stress among teachers [that

yields] poor performance, absenteeism and low levels of job satisfaction, [to which] teachers receive little training on emotions and coping mechanisms. (p. 135)

Many teachers report increased symptoms of depression and anxiety in their transitions from training to teaching (McLean, Abry, Taylor, Jimenez, & Granger, 2017). In addition, the mental health needs of students continue to increase as they present in Canadian classrooms (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2014), putting pressure on teachers to care for complex student needs when, in many cases, they have not yet managed their own. In 2012, The Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation (Martin, Dolmage, & Sharpe, 2012) reported from a review of over 700 teachers that over 30% had sought medical care for migraines, almost 25% had sought support for depression or other mood related disorders, and 78% reported difficulty sleeping. The majority of the participants in the 2012 study indicated that “the demands of their work as teachers had a negative impact on their ability to pursue personal interests (78%); their family lives (69%); their relationships with their spouses/partners (64%); and friends (55%)” (p. 20). These results have been reflected in other similar Canadian studies as well, indicating that teaching can be burdensome for many and stress must be understood, and mitigated, in order to fulfill the increasing responsibilities of the role (Harvey & Spinney, 2000).

Stress, as it impacts the teacher-student relationship should also be highlighted, as noted stress in teachers has been linked empirically to reciprocal stress in students (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). The research around the impact of living or working in a stressful environment has led some scientific studies to explore a relatively new domain in the classroom that links teacher stress to student behaviour. Canadian researchers Oberle and Schonert-Reichl (2016) made ground-breaking observations in their study, which connected the stress of over 400 students through their cortisol levels to relatable stress in their teachers. Unsurprisingly, the

results showed that the impact of stress remains undeniable in a classroom. Similar studies in the area of classroom management support that stress may be perpetuated in poorly managed classrooms, and students who experience stressful classroom environments can exhibit “more behavioural and adjustment problems in school” (2016, p. 35).

If stuck in a damaging, chaotic, or unhealthy cycle, teachers and students can continue to make matters worse with feelings of unresolved conflict or mismanaged stress, resulting in lowered relational capabilities (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). In early explorations of social learning theory and self-efficacy, Bandura (1977) explored the mediating effect of stimulus and response theory. He found that positive and negative behaviours can be learned, or more or less absorbed, through the existence of either positive or negative energy in a particular environment.

A negative attitude may perpetuate challenging behaviour, and vice versa, which can lead to increased teacher stress, student stress, and eventual burnout. Research suggests that the practices of mindfulness and self-regulation can support students’ and teachers’ well-being by calming the physical space, supporting emotion-regulation, and alleviating stress (Jennings et al., 2013). It remains of critical importance to understand how teacher behaviours, feelings, and actions can be supportive of decreasing stress in their practice. By finding ways to support teachers to do everything they can to contribute to a positive classroom environment, they will support positive student behaviour and learning, as well as teacher and student well-being.

### **Preparation for a Diverse Role**

In a review of the literature on teachers and their role in supporting a positive classroom climate, common practices and discourses were found. Most notable were teacher efficacy, stress management, access to tools and strategies to support a variety of learning or behaviour needs, and an emphasis on relationships and well-being (Kennedy, Hirsch,

Rodgers, Bruce, & Lloyd, 2017; Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004). One study with almost 300 teachers, from five school districts in the mid-western United States, found that the top three concerns for teachers were the following: (a) acquiring strategies for working with children with externalizing behaviour problems; (b) recognizing and understanding mental health issues in children; and (c) training in classroom management, behavioural interventions, and conflict resolution (Reinke et al., 2013). These findings have been replicated in hundreds of other studies (Melnick & Meister, 2008) and represent the need for interpersonal skill development in the affective domain.

Teacher candidates are in one of the best positions to take advantage of training and guidance in order to prepare and respond to student needs. A focus on teacher education around the mental health, care, and management needs of teachers, in which they learn about and transfer knowledge, skills, and practices to support themselves and students, could be of particular relevance in twenty-first century education programs (Butler & Monda-Amaya, 2016; Freeman et al., 2014; Palomera, Fernández-Berrocal, & Brackett, 2008). Findings from resilience focused teacher training programs supports that, though not enough is known about immersion in wellness and health-care practices at the pre-service level, the potential is there for teacher training to support self-care practices that can mitigate stress or prevent burnout.

Though less is known about mitigating burnout and supporting resilience at the pre-service level, Miller and Flint-Stipp (2019) noted suggestions for supporting teacher resilience via mindfulness practices and general self-care workshops at any level:

Teacher education can thus play a key role by making resilience central to its mission and infusing self-care into coursework, as well as into mentored experiences in the field. For example, in response to our findings, the elementary education course that served as the

platform for this study now introduces “trauma,” “secondary trauma,” and “self-care” on the first day of class, and revisits these concepts at the beginning of each subsequent session, in tandem with concrete [transferable] self-care activities. (p. 41)

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) issued a report in 2007, noting the need for diverse competencies of care in teacher education:

Currently, teacher training emphasizes mastery of academic content as the necessary base of knowledge for providing quality education. However, the changing demographics in school communities and the persistent disparities in educational achievement and attainment call for integrating new knowledge bases in teacher preparation programs. Teachers need a working knowledge of the principles of child and adolescent development in order to master the techniques that enable students to learn. (p. 4)

Given the complexities of the twenty-first century classroom, supporting students requires care and attention to the theory and practice of teaching and learning (Cefai & Cavioni, 2013).

### **Bridging the Gap**

Research shows that as teachers move into the workforce they experience a gap between how they were trained in theory and what they actually face in practice (Allen, 2009; McDonough, 2012; Stough et al., 2015). Despite the practical opportunities that exist through field experiences at the pre-service level, there continues to be a need for learning and experience rooted in the practical applications of pedagogy to meet the needs of both students and teachers (McDonough, 2012). These practical applications involve attention to risk and protective factors that may support teachers to strengthen their own practice against adversity in the first few years (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011). Considering that formal mentorship does not always

happen for new teachers in Saskatchewan (Lemisko, Hellsten, & Demchuk-Kosolofski, 2017), there exists a variety of considerations for pre-service training to support building an educator's personal capacity for strength.

In a review of university education programs, Cameron and Cook (2007) found that "general educators reported taking 1.5 courses on average in which inclusion or special education content was a major focus, as opposed to approximately 11 courses for special educators" (p. 360). Given that the reality of twenty-first century classrooms means offering special education supports in general education settings, the needs of teachers have changed considerably. Stainback and Stainback (1989) recommended that a complement of core courses for TCs include required courses in child and adolescent development; human relationships and sensitivity to human difference; classroom organization, management, and motivational strategies; peer-mediation strategies such as cooperative group learning, peer tutoring, and supports for students as peacemakers and mediators of conflict; and courses in support of differentiated instruction.

Welcoming diversity in general education classrooms is the right thing to do, as inclusion has a significant impact on students' holistic development. However, diverse classrooms have meant that teachers must possess skills to support and manage students who bring unique needs to the educational space. In a province with rising class sizes, pre-service teacher education programs and new teacher induction programs are tasked with the challenge of preparing all classroom teachers to manage diversity and the special education needs of many students (Lupart & Webber, 2002). Special education as a job for the generalist remains the norm. Lupart and Webber state that when teachers are trained in practices that support meeting diverse student needs they fare better than if they are not trained in those practices:

Observation data indicated that 18 out of 19 teachers who reported taking classroom management courses in special education demonstrated average or above management skills and maintained warm, supportive environments . . . the least accomplished teachers seemed to have the most insufficient preparation in classroom management. Four out of six teachers received a low classroom management rating of 1.5, and all attributed their lack of control, in part, to a lack of preparation or opportunities to practice. (p. 85)

The development of skills in a variety of domains, that go beyond strategies to support general education, are increasingly necessary at the pre-service level. These skills require explicit instruction in areas that support conceptual and relational skill development, and they are an essential factor in readying teachers to meet the demands of the profession. Highlighted next are skills that may be considered less often for explicit instruction, yet they reflect adequate preparation for the required competencies of the profession in the twenty-first century.

### ***Soft Skills***

Over the last couple of decades, the importance of soft skills has increased dramatically (Schulz, 2008). Effective classroom managers have mastered the art of these skills, which are just as relevant for teaching as they are in any other leadership roles (Pachauri & Yadav, 2014). Soft skills are seen as skills that compliment academic skills and are noted as teamwork, communication, reasoning, and problem-solving skills, among skills related to one's personality and habits (Schulz, 2008). Table 2.1 is an adaptation of a chart provided by Pachauri and Yadav (2014), whose work contributes to the literature in support of relevant soft skill development that is essential for teacher success.

**Table 2.1**

*Essential Soft Skills for Teachers*

<b>Seven Soft Skills</b>	<b>Must Have Elements</b>	<b>Good to Have Elements</b>
<b>Communication</b>	Ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• deliver ideas clearly, effectively and with confidence, either orally or in writing;</li> <li>• practice active listening skills and respond;</li> <li>• present clearly and confidently to the audience.</li> </ul>	Ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use technology during presentation;</li> <li>• discuss and arrive at a consensus;</li> <li>• communicate with individuals from different cultural backgrounds;</li> <li>• expand one's own communicative skills.</li> </ul>
<b>Critical &amp; Creative Thinking/Problem-Solving</b>	Ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify and analyze problems in difficult situations and make justifiable evaluations;</li> <li>• expand and improve thinking skills such as explanation, analysis and evaluation of discussions;</li> <li>• find ideas and look for alternative solutions.</li> </ul>	Ability to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• think beyond or challenge early solutions;</li> <li>• make conclusions based on valid proof;</li> <li>• withstand and give full responsibility;</li> <li>• understand and accommodate oneself to the varied working environment.</li> </ul>
<b>Team Work</b>	Ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• build a good rapport, interact and work effectively with others;</li> <li>• understand and play the role of a leader and follower alternatively;</li> <li>• recognize and respect others' attitudes, behaviour and beliefs.</li> </ul>	Ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• contribute to the planning and coordination of group work;</li> <li>• be responsible for group decisions.</li> </ul>
<b>Life-Long Learning &amp; Information Management</b>	Ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• find and manage relevant information from various sources;</li> <li>• receive new ideas;</li> <li>• perform autonomous learning.</li> </ul>	Ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop curiosity, an inquiring mind and seek knowledge.</li> </ul>
<b>Entrepreneurial</b>	Ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify opportunities.</li> </ul>	Ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• propose business opportunities;</li> <li>• build, explore and seek business opportunities and jobs;</li> <li>• be self-employed.</li> </ul>
<b>Ethics, Moral &amp; Professional</b>	Ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand the economic crisis, environment and social, cultural aspects, professionally;</li> <li>• analyze and make problem-solving decisions related to ethics.</li> </ul>	Ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• practice ethical attitudes,</li> <li>• have responsibility toward society.</li> </ul>

<b>Seven Soft Skills</b>	<b>Must Have Elements</b>	<b>Good to Have Elements</b>
<b>Leadership</b>	Ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lead a project;</li> <li>• understand the basic theories of leadership.</li> </ul>	Ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand and take turns as a leader and follower;</li> <li>• supervise members of a group.</li> </ul>

*Note:* Adapted from Pachauri and Yadav (2014)

Some of these essential skills are recognized in Saskatchewan Teacher Education and Certification Competencies (TECC), practiced through 16 weeks of extended practicum (College of Education, University of Saskatchewan), and then developed as part of teacher Professional Growth Plans (PGP) while in practice. These skills, along with Saskatchewan professional goals and standards (Appendices A, B, & C), highlight the importance of affective and psycho-motor expectations for teachers as being key areas for proficiency. Explicit attention to their development could be seen as an asset for teachers in the twenty-first century.

### ***Problem-Solving Skills***

It has been said that problem-solving is an essential feature of resilience and that resilient individuals “cope with stress by actively employing strategies to solve problems (Southwick & Charney, 2018, p. 44). Southwick and Charney also note that “positive emotion in caregivers was positively related to active problem-solving strategies, such as pursuing realistic and attainable caregiving goals” (p. 44). Teaching and learning happen in dynamic environments where social, emotional, academic, and behavioural changes occur rapidly as students interact to solve problems (Lin et al., 2005). Problem-solving, and the related reflective and metacognitive processes involved, are skills that quality teachers must demonstrate and practice (Lin et al., 2005). Lin et al. completed an analysis of metacognitive practices used by teachers. They made four suggestions for the development of adaptive metacognition that could be used to support teachers in problem-solving:

1. Instead of assuming that a given task should induce almost the same activity from everybody (a series of actions aimed at a taken-for-granted goal), we emphasize that varied teaching or learning goals can be set, and thus different activities can be derived for apparently the same educational tasks and materials, depending on the values of the participants.
2. We propose that planning appropriate activities and observing activities engaged by others with different values or sociocultural backgrounds gives a very good opportunity for participants to reflect on their own goals and also learn how best to set goals under given constraints.
3. We claim that social, collaborative situations might be used more often in the assessment and training of metacognition. Many important situations for teachers are highly social in nature. So, rather than solving bookish problems, they need to think about how to arrange social matters.
4. Teachers need opportunities to develop the habits of gathering more information so that they can determine what strategies and solutions to apply. (pp. 253–254)

Problem-solving remains a skill that is difficult to teach without associated experience (Bransford, Sherwood, Vye, & Rieser, 1986). Teacher candidates can be led through activities that challenge them just outside of their comfort zones and encourage them to strive for solutions while being guided by either other expert teachers or teacher educators (Warford, 2011).

Utilizing what is known as the zone of proximal teacher development (ZPTD) in teacher education can help to scaffold (i.e. the bridge formed between the supports offered and what the student brings to the process through their learning; foundations for growth) problem-solving skills through active learning strategies (Bransford, Sherwood, Vye, & Rieser, 1986; Warford,

2011). Podolsky and Darling-Hammond (2019) investigated what they referred to as Teacher Preparation for Deeper Learning (TPDL), which utilized the following skills to prepare teachers for the classroom:

[We] emphasized deep content knowledge, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration skills; a child centered pedagogy; experiential and community-oriented learning opportunities; and learning mind-sets that give students agency over their education. (p. 11)

Podolsky and Darling-Hammond (2019) felt that TPDL was not a current trend in many teacher-education programs, however, it “supported the type of self-assessment, [problem-solving], and metacognition the TCs will ultimately encourage in their students to explore, so they may become more self-directed learners” (pp. 93–94).

### ***Instructional Skills***

Twenty-first century pedagogical and instructional models exist that can contribute to a classroom which supports authentic engagement, teacher well-being, management of students, mitigation of stress (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2018), and the development of challenging and meaningful learning experiences (Podolsky & Darling-Hammond, 2019). The art of tailoring curriculum to engage and excite students through meaningful work, especially when considering the inclusion of students with diverse learning needs, is a skill that must be developed in pre-service programs to strengthen teaching practice (Simonsen et al., Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers, & Sugai, 2008).

Management issues are decreased in classrooms where students are engaged through diverse learning opportunities. Rimm-Kaufman, La Paro, Downer, and Pianta (2005) reported “findings indicate that in the presence of high-quality instructional and emotional support from

the teacher, children are more consistently able to meet these challenges in a competent manner” (p. 390). Some examples of high-quality instruction include inquiry-based learning, the use of differentiated instructional strategies, a Universal Design for Learning (UDL), flipped classrooms, mobile or place-based learning, understanding and planning holistically, and recognition of the importance of authentic, inclusive practices with respect to culture and other diversities (Bellanca, 2015). Such innovations in planning involve thematic and cross-disciplinary experiences that are thoughtfully structured to engage and motivate young people (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012; Sharma, Arthur-Kelly, Paterson, 2018).

Pedagogical innovations can mitigate problem behaviour by deeply connecting students to the learning through authentic and open-ended learning, which guide students through the application of skills that transfer from school to life (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012; Podolsky & Darling-Hammond, 2019). However, such open-ended practices can also take TCs and teachers outside of their comfort zones; exploring tasks with multiple solutions or means of investigation can be complicated and overwhelming. Nevertheless, innovative and strategic planning significantly improves classroom quality of life, and, over time, decreases stress and increases engagement (Podolsky & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Additionally, innovative instructional practices can open up opportunities for learning (Bellanca, 2015). If both student and teacher present and develop an open mind, they can build rapport and support and strengthen one another along the way (Bellanca, 2015).

### ***Organizational Skills***

The literature does not provide specific templates for classroom arrangement; however, an organized space with minimal distractions or clutter and room to move has been shown to support learning and thus mitigate problem behaviour (Simonsen et al., 2008). Furthermore,

when improving the classroom environment, teachers should consider sensory conditions that help to regulate mood and emotions. For example, the research involving those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) tells us that calm, dimly lit spaces, which are free of clutter, help to calm the mind and body. In addition to those with ASD, such spaces help all students to increase the use of self-regulation strategies (Emmer & Stough, 2001). Research suggest that teachers who adopt such changes to their classrooms and “provide [more] efficient and productive learning environments” are better able to “maintain children’s engagement, and enhance children’s cooperative and compliant behaviors” (Rimm-Kaufman, La Paro, Downer, & Pianta, 2005, p. 379).

### **Conclusions from the Literature**

To support learning, the expectations placed on educators in Saskatchewan (Appendices A, B, & C) requires that they be competent in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains (Bloom 1956, 1964). Pre-service programs help to develop competencies in these domains and inspire purposeful, developmentally appropriate, inclusive, and culturally responsive practices (Table 3.1). However, teachers are not uniformly or explicitly trained in some of the skills needed for managing a learning environment with myriad student needs. Classroom make-up, in terms of “skill development, basic needs, cultural, intellectual, medical, and behavioural factors, accompanied by differentiated instructional needs,” greatly affects how teachers are prepared for teaching (Joint Committee of the Ministry of Education, Saskatchewan School Boards Association, and the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation Report, 2015, p. 11). Managing student needs in all areas requires intensive classroom management, as well as pedagogical, social-emotional, and conceptual skills training (Palomera, Fernández-Berrocal, & Brackett, 2008). As the demands on teachers continue to increase, “levels of emotional burnout” (Hong, 2010, p.

1537) do so as well, requiring teachers to be more resourceful and resilient (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011). The breadth of teacher skill development and training has not kept up to the demands of the inclusive, twenty-first century classroom, where the needs of students and the demands of the profession are on the rise (Evertson & Weinstein, 2013).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methodology**

The methodological approach chosen for this research was qualitative case study (Creswell, 2013), and it involved gathering data from four teachers from different schools in one urban school division in Saskatchewan. Creswell (2013) further refers to this type of multi-site approach as a collective case study. The study aimed to collect, analyze, and interpret the experiences and perspectives of four early career teachers (ECTs) recognized by their administrators as competent and thriving based on provincial measures of teacher competence (Appendices A, B, & C). Each ECT was chosen because they were seen to be thriving in a profession known to be synonymous with stress and burnout in the first five years (Canadian Teacher's Federation, 2014; Froese-Germain, 2014; Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). As themes were constructed from each of the ECTs perspectives and analyzed through the researcher's lens, the epistemological position for this work remained interpretive and constructivist throughout (Creswell, 2013). The findings are constructed as an account of knowledge, skills, and attributes seen in the teachers' practice and discussed during interviews. This chapter outlines qualitative research as an overarching framework for a constructivist approach to case study.

#### **Qualitative Research: An Overview**

Creswell (2013) explained qualitative research as procedures or methodologies “characterized as inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analyzing the data” (p. 22). Within qualitative work especially “it is important for researchers to be constantly aware and to systematically reflect on their own personal identity and impact on the participants and research setting” (Heigham & Croker, 2009, p. 11). I acknowledge that my perspectives and experiences as an educator have contributed to the

direction of this research, as well as the analysis of emergent themes later described. As I interacted intimately with each participant's words, during and after the interviews, my influence served as an element integral to the construction of knowledge throughout the process. The findings of this work are a product of the connections made between the researcher and the participants. Creswell (2013) refers to this collaborative and co-constructed approach as "interpretive [qualitative] research" (p. 25). Through a social and cultural lens, an emphasis was placed on the construction of knowledge from all involved (participants and researcher). These interactions directly shaped a constructivist approach to this study from start to finish (Vygotsky, 1978).

Reflections, interpretations, and constructions of the presenting ideas were coded thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006), as is often done in qualitative work. The result was a presentation of diverse contexts, made up of each participant's background and experiences. Classrooms are unpredictable environments that require the use of diverse skill sets. As decisions are made, behaviours are managed, and needs in various domains are met. At the same time, classrooms are places where effective working environments must be maintained, and, if successful, essential skills and relationships are built as a result (Lin, Schwartz, & Hatano, 2005). Qualitative case study was an approach to this research that supported the exploration of a lesser known, however, complex phenomenon: thriving despite adversity in the profession of teaching. Constructivism worked within an interpretive theoretical framework to support the iterative process of knowledge development through the phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interpretations of the experiences and perspectives of the participants through the particular lens of the researcher, support findings and considerations for teachers and teacher education (Creswell 2013; Stetsenko and Arievidtch, 1997).

## **Constructivism: A Framework for Qualitative Research**

Merriam (1988) maintained “the key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based is the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds” (p. 6). Providing that psychological or philosophical assumptions support all forms of qualitative research, including case study, this study was informed through an understanding of constructivism, a theoretical approach explored by many: Dewey (1859 – 1952), Vygotsky (1896 – 1943), and Piaget (1896 – 1980). Constructivism posits that people produce knowledge and form meaning based upon their experiences (Piaget, 1936). The theory describes learning as an active social process (Vygotsky, 1978), which is developed through involvement in specific contexts with emphasis on the importance of “culture and context,” in this case, the classroom (Kim, 2001, p. 2).

Creswell (2007) outlines constructivism as one of “four worldviews that inform qualitative research” (p. 19), stating that constructivists “seek understanding of the worlds in which they live and work” (p. 20). Constructivist research builds knowledge based on both the participant’s and researcher’s perspectives. Stake (1995) asserted that “most contemporary qualitative researchers nourish the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered” (p. 99). This agreement aligns with Braun and Clarke’s (2019) approach to thematic analysis: “a more active process of developing themes through our interactions with the data” (p. 18). In a constructivist methodology, knowledge and meaning are sought through the process of interactions, which, in this case, took place during semi-structured, open-ended interviews, and through observation and reflection. This lens honours both the participant’s and the researcher’s perspectives in the development of themes as they evolved by way of a socially constructed process (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Stake, 1995).

## **Social Constructivism**

Interactions between the researcher and each teacher, in the context of interviews and classroom observations (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 2011), helped to shape this study, the analysis, and the resulting construction of themes. Vygotsky (1978), who contributed to the evolution of constructivist learning theory, attended to the social aspects of learning and constructing knowledge, by paying specific attention to the importance of social interactions, language, culture, and context, in how we learn (Fosnot & Perry, 1996). Social construction of knowledge happens as people make sense of the world and their place within it to construct “their social worlds and their identities” (Anfara & Mertz, 2006, p. 59). Social constructivism, as applied to qualitative research, supports an emphasis on how participants and researchers together “make sense of and interpret their experiences” (Butler, Crowfoot, Quain, Davey, Magin, & Maguire, 2017). Jeannine Hirtle (1996) stated the following:

Constructivism serves to open boundaries through inquiry, not through unquestioned acceptance of prevailing knowledge. It is the realization that knowledge is never neutral, that the ways in which knowledge is mediated and created are as dynamic and important as the knowledge itself. (p. 91)

As a preferred epistemological orientation to teaching and learning, social constructivist theory suited this work nicely.

Social constructivism is rooted in the notion that learning is cultural, contextual, and reflective of experiences and interactions among people, places, and things. It is based on perspectives or beliefs that are constructed through an ongoing active process. Social constructivism, as described by Stetsenko and Arieivitch (1997), has three assumptions:

A process (dynamics) instead of structure (statics); an activity instead of a passive maturation; and as an ongoing, contextualized interaction mediated by language and other semiotic devices in a culturally and historically relativized context instead of a solitary practicing of an 'internal machinery' of cognitive skills. (p. 161)

Bandura (1977) suggested that by studying the various methods used by competent teachers, one may construct knowledge about the nuances of effective practice and that this knowledge may, in turn, guide improvements to the profession of teaching. These nuances can cultivate excellence in both teachers and students and they include the development of social, emotional, mental, and physical realms of teaching and learning, including interactions among people, materials, and resources (Mills, Harrison, Franklin, & Birks, 2017).

The doctoral program supporting this research was a cross departmental program at the University of Saskatchewan, and this work was situated amidst the link between two disciplines: educational psychology and curriculum studies. These two departments within the discipline of education merge beautifully to shape the construction of meaning through practical applications and together they inform the dynamic and contextual areas of teaching. Psychology focuses inherently on the notion that reality is constructed within, and understood through, human interaction, including through activity, communication, and collaboration (Kim, 2001; Stetsenko & Arievidt, 1997). Curriculum studies accounts for the strategies that support learning and the processes of acquiring and applying knowledge in various contexts, which often happens as people construct meaning to learn from and support others (Kim, 2001). These areas, each addressed throughout this work, are foundationally, social and constructivist.

## **Framing the Research**

When planning a qualitative case study, the research questions frame and provide the boundaries for the scope of the work (Mills, Harrison, Franklin, & Birks, 2017). Noting that case study was an applicable qualitative methodology, Mills et al. provided the following guidelines for the development of research in case study: the inquiry asks the “why, what, and how of an issue”; it aims to “assist researchers to explore, explain, describe, evaluate, and theorize about complex issues in context” (p. 16); and asking the right questions “can lead to an in-depth understanding of behaviours, processes, practices, and relationships in context” (p. 16). Yin (1994) recognized case study as a highly useful research methodology when “how or why” questions were being asked about contemporary issues or events “over which the investigator has little or no control” (p. 9). In this case, the research questions frame the work by defining the boundaries, context, scope, and focus for how data would be collected and managed throughout.

## **Case Study**

Qualitative research can be approached in many ways, depending on the orientation and desired results of the work. One of the five approaches for qualitative inquiry explored by Creswell (2013) was the case study, which serves as an appropriate methodology when the desired results require the collection of multiple sources of information in support of a description of events or themes from which to apply an analysis. Creswell (2013) explained that case study “is the study of [cases] within real-life contemporary contexts or settings” and noted that these explorations take place within a “bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection” (p. 97). Case study has been a popular approach used across many disciplines, including that of psychology and education (Creswell, 2013).

While numerous definitions exist for case study research, many agree that it serves as a research methodology that offers a holistic focus on real-life contexts or phenomenon. Case study utilizes multiple sources of data to provide a descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory qualitative reflection and analysis (Christie, Rowe, Perry, & Chamard, 2000; Creswell, 2013). Among those who have defined or utilized case study in the past (McKinney, 1966; Patton, 1990; Smith, 1988), three contemporary authors are commonly cited with respect to this approach: 1) Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (1998); 2) Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (1995), and; 3) Yin, *Case Study Research, Design and Methods* (1994, 2014). Yin (1994) proposed that “case studies can be conducted and written with many different motives, including the simple presentation of individual cases or the desire to arrive at broad generalizations based on case study evidence” (p. 15). Stake (1988) wrote that case study, as a single, bounded system, emphasized “the unity and wholeness of that system” (p. 258), noting that each case must be confined to the particular aspects of the problem being studied (bounded). Lastly, Merriam (1988) asserted that cases are “selected for their power both to maximize and to minimize differences in the phenomenon of interest” (p. 154).

### **Design and Research Questions**

Yin (1994) stated that a well thought out case study design was the most appropriate approach for “appreciating the complexity of organizational phenomena” (p. xv). Yin (1994) recommended that a case study should unfold through four stages: 1) a clear design of the case study; 2) relative data gathering; 3) analysis of evidence; and 4) the development of conclusions, recommendations, and implications. Additionally, Yin (2018) noted that a careful consideration of each of these stages offered an effective blueprint for the work. The first step, according to Yin (2018), was to decide on a single or multiple case study design. In order to make this

decision the researcher looks to the questions and sub-questions that support the boundaries of the work. In this case the questions pertained to the development of teacher competencies and thriving in the profession, and the following questions helped with this evaluation:

1. What knowledge, skills, or attitudes (competencies) do thriving ECTs possess?
2. How does the development of particular knowledge, skills, or attitudes (competencies) contribute to thriving in the profession of teaching?
3. How has the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (competencies) present in thriving ECTs been attained or refined?

Sub-questions looked to understand the ways in which the teachers constructed knowledge, made decisions, and interacted in the classroom:

- a. How do the ECTs prepare and set up their learning environments (i.e. teach, manage resources, assess)?
- b. How do the ECTs construct pedagogical knowledge or beliefs and use that information to make decisions about their practice?
- c. How do the ECTs manage the classroom (i.e. safety, learning, behaviour, comfort)?
- d. How do the ECTs relate and interact with students and build relationships in the context of their classrooms?

According to Stake (1995), a case study design may be used when the focus of the research questions supports the understanding of a particular or unique phenomenon.

Understanding unique phenomena is a trademark of the case study approach (Eckstein, 2002; Gerring, 2004; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2003). The unique phenomena investigated here were ECTs who felt confident and competent in their work, given that 30% to 50% of their peers leave the

profession within the first five years (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). It was decided that looking to multiple cases would support an approach to findings that involved at least a few perspectives. Yin (2018) noted that when designing a case study, particularly an interpretive case study, one should look to cases that are most likely to “illuminate the research questions” (p. 38). Because my research questions pertained to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of thriving ECTs, I sought out teachers whose administrators could attest to their thriving as competent educators despite being early in their careers (Appendices A, B, & C).

Stake (1995) noted that the first decision in the design of a case study should be to select cases that can maximize what is hoped to be learned. Stake specified that given the purpose, cases should be selected based upon those which “are likely to lead us to understandings, to assertions, and perhaps even to modifying of generalizations” (p. 4). Though many, including myself, do not ascribe to the notion of generalizations from qualitative research designs, as “it is far easier, and more epistemologically sound, simply to give up on the idea of generalization” (Lincoln & Guba, 2002, p. 32), others promote generalizations as a possibility (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). In this case, it was hoped that the selected cases would maximize the potential for extracting knowledge around what *is* and what *contributes* to a competent and thriving educator and the results support considerations, not generalizations. Though generalization of the findings was not the goal of this research, it was hoped that by looking to these exemplary cases, themes might emerge that would support relevant considerations for the teaching profession.

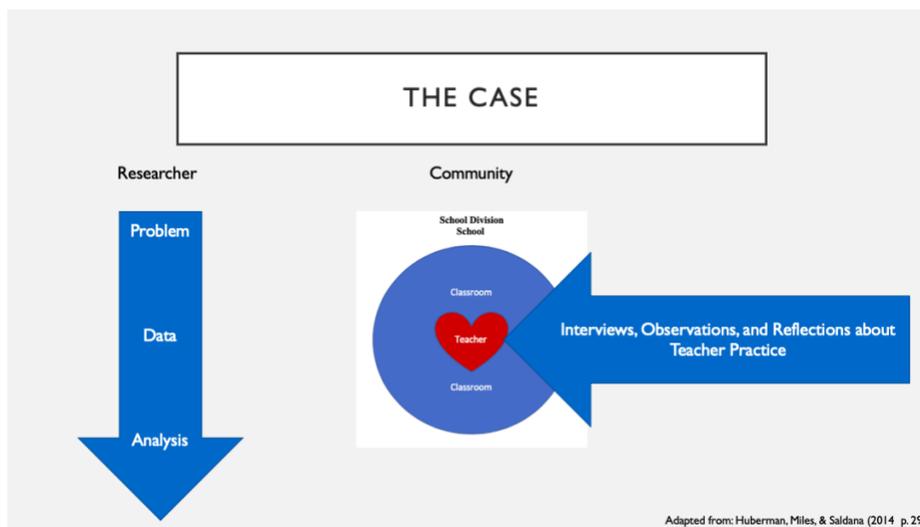
## **Methods**

A variety of methods were used to triangulate the data for analysis and an understanding of the potential themes. The methods included multiple cases (four) and involved a thematic analysis of interviews, observations, and researcher field notes, along with an analysis of the

researcher’s reflections to formulate findings from a variety of contexts. Methodological decisions around data collection, management, and analysis in a case study help to frame the case, providing the parameters for participants: site selection, processes for data collection and analysis, and timeframe for the study (Mills, Harrison, Franklin, & Birks, 2017). A visual representation of these parameters is represented in Figure 2.1, which presents an overview of how the complex co-construction of classroom processes were approached in this case.

**Figure 2.1**

*The Case & Conceptual Framework: Boundaries and Focus with the Teacher at the Heart*



Huberman, Miles, and Saldana (2014) remark that in a case study such as this, the teacher is positioned as the case, at the heart of the research, from which various other contexts exist or contribute, though they may not be explicitly studied. Huberman, Miles, and Saldana’s (2014) metaphor of the heart, also used in the findings (See Figure 4.1, Chapter Four), depicts the work as a practical interpretation of the teaching and learning environments that help to shape or contribute to the ECTs’ practice. The teacher, at the core of the work, is bordered by a variety of contributing contexts, i.e. the classroom, the school, the school division, and community. The

researcher frames the case by extracting data based on the decisions they make around methods and design.

### **Participant Selection**

In qualitative case studies, Creswell (2013) recommends no more than four to five participants. For this study, it was decided that four ECTs would be a manageable number from which data sets could be analyzed and compared. Data saturation was not a goal of this work. The aim was to have enough participants from which a thematic analysis would prove fruitful. In this case, participants were purposely selected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) on the following criteria: (a) ECTs who have taught for less than five years and (b) ECTs who were felt to be thriving at this early stage in their career (self described and noted by their administrators). As noted in the literature review, teaching is a profession with an increased rate of burnout, with research suggesting that the number of teachers who leave in the first five years could be as high as 30% to 50% (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). This selection of teachers, seen to be thriving, were considered a phenomenon worthy of exploration as a contribution to the profession.

### ***Context***

In Saskatchewan, pre-service educators take three to five psychology courses (depending on area of specialty, some may take more) to support them with teaching, assessment, differentiating instruction, and managing diversity. In addition, these courses are also intended to help prepare TCs for daily challenges in the classroom, such as supporting behaviour or attending to mental health concerns. Teacher candidates at the University of Saskatchewan are trained according to the Saskatchewan Teacher Education and Certification Competencies (TECC). The professional goals of the college reflect the Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board (SPTRB).

The University of Saskatchewan has adapted these teaching competencies as seen in the following 15 skills, eight of which refer to skills in an affective or psychomotor domain (Bloom 1956, 1964) and seven of which refer to knowledge in a cognitive domain:

**Table 3.1**

*Adapted TECC Goals*

<b>Goal 1: Personal &amp; Professional Competencies</b>	<b>Goal 2: Knowledge Competencies</b>	<b>Goal 3: Instructional Competencies</b>	<b>Goal 4: Curricular Competencies</b>
1.1 The ability to maintain respectful, mutually supportive and equitable professional relationships with learners, colleagues, families and communities.	2.1 Knowledge of Canadian history, especially in reference to Saskatchewan and Western Canada.  2.2 Proficiency in the Language of Instruction.	3.1 The ability to utilize meaningful, equitable, and holistic approaches to assessment and evaluation.	4.1 Knowledge of Saskatchewan curriculum and policy documents and applies this understanding to plan lessons, units of study, and year plans using curriculum outcomes as outlined by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education.
1.2 Ethical behaviour and the ability to work in a collaborative manner for the good of all learners.	2.3 Knowledge of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit culture and history (e.g., Treaties, Residential School, Scrip and Worldview).	3.2 The ability to use a wide variety of responsive instructional strategies and methodologies to accommodate learning styles of individual learners and support their growth as social, intellectual, physical, and spiritual beings.	4.2 The ability to incorporate First Nations, Métis, and Inuit knowledge, content, and perspective into all teaching areas.
1.3 A commitment to social justice and the capacity to nurture an inclusive and equitable environment for the empowerment of all learners.	2.4 Ability to use technologies readily, strategically, and appropriately.  2.5 Knowledge of a number of subjects taught in Saskatchewan schools (disciplinary/interdisciplinary knowledge).		4.3 The capacity to engage in program planning to shape ‘lived curriculum’ that brings learner needs, subject matter, and contextual variables together in developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and meaningful ways.
1.4 A commitment to service and the capacity to be a reflective, lifelong learner and inquirer.	2.6 Ability to strive for/pursue new knowledge.		

*Note:* Goals adapted from the University of Saskatchewan, College of Education

Through coursework in their undergraduate program, Saskatchewan TCs are exposed to each of the above noted areas with multiple opportunities to develop competence. Depending on the nature of a course, and the intended learning outcomes, it can be expected that TCs are supported in developing as many competencies as possible. Teacher candidates are also assessed based on these competencies through their field experiences in classrooms, and competent teachers are seen as educators who are proficient at maintaining or exhibiting the above noted knowledge and skills. Proficiency is regularly assessed as part of the learning process. However, there was no assessment of skills for this study. These competencies were used to help identify potential participants, anchor conversations, and identify practices worth noting during classroom observations.

### *Sample*

Purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was used to seek out four ECTs from one large school division in the province of Saskatchewan, who were considered to be competent and thriving teachers by their administrators (Appendices A, B, C). Merriam and Tisdell stated that within a case study, two levels of purposeful sampling exist: first, the criteria for selecting the cases according to pre-established criteria, and second, a description of how the sample of people were selected within each case. A few considerations existed with respect to selecting participants for this work:

1. Teachers were sought from elementary school environments only in order to lessen the potential of the researcher and participants crossing paths collegially (power imbalance).
2. Given that this study was designed to understand the skills and practices of ECTs who were thriving, only teachers who were within their first five years, and whom

administrators felt were thriving and displayed competence were considered. It was indicated to each school administrator and teacher (Appendices D & E) that the notion of thriving could be defined as those who met teacher competency expectations and standards in the province of Saskatchewan while successfully navigating the following elements of their career: prepare, teach, manage, relate (Appendices A, B, & C). Teachers defined success for themselves.

Though the number of participants in an adequate sample can be debated, Patton (2002) proposed that “exercising care not to over generalize from small purposeful samples, while maximizing to the full, the advantages,” was key (p. 246). Patton also noted that “in-depth, purposeful sampling, will do much to alleviate concerns about sample size” (p. 246). It was decided that four participants, with approximately four interviews and classroom observations each, would provide a balance of breadth and depth for the scope of this inquiry. Four participants were also seen as a manageable number for a qualitative research project, wherein proper attention could be given to the details gleaned from each case (Creswell, 2013). Patton stated “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” (p. 244), however, others (Creswell, 2013; Wolcott, 2008) recommend keeping the numbers between one and five participants. These recommendations guided the decision that four ECTs would be an appropriate number of participants.

This sample size allowed for four meetings each, over three months. From these interactions rich data was accumulated. Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that a minimum of “between 15 and 30 individual interviews tends to be common in research which aims to identify patterns across the data sets” (p. 55). With 16 completed interviews, among the four participants, ample data between the sets, allowed for thematic analysis to support conclusions and

considerations for teacher education from this work. For this case study, the goal was to construct a meaningful interpretation of the inherent patterns in the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of competent and thriving ECTs, each of whom agreed that, despite challenges and setbacks, they were thriving in the profession.

### ***Recruitment Process***

In March of 2019, upon receiving approval from the Behavioural Ethics Review Board at the University of Saskatchewan (Appendix G), a letter outlining the study (Appendix C) was sent to all elementary school administrators in one large school division in Saskatchewan. The letter outlined the rationale, parameters for participant recruitment, time commitment, and ethical considerations for this inquiry. It also asked school-based administrators to forward the information on to any ECTs in their buildings (teaching < 5 years) who they felt were meeting the standards and goals of the profession while thriving, i.e. competent and successful in four areas: preparation for teaching; teaching; managing; and relating with others (Appendices A, B, & C). The communication with administrators detailed the number of educators who choose to leave the profession within the first five years (30 – 50% globally) and explained that this study hoped to learn from ECTs who were managing, despite the adversities many face (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019).

School-based administrators were asked to privately share the study particulars with only those ECTs whom they felt were thriving, based on the researcher's attention to the noted competencies in the profession. School-based administrators were informed that once they forwarded the information to the select ECTs, those who wished to participate should contact the researcher directly. This layer of protection was used to minimize pressure on the teachers to volunteer. Administrators were also notified that, upon forwarding the study to ECTs (Appendix

E), they would only be contacted again if a teacher from their school wished to participate; in which case the administrators were notified and sent scripts for staff (Appendix F). From that point forward, communication was solely between the teacher participants and the researcher. All conversations were confidential and held in a private setting within each school. Teacher participants were not anonymous within their school; however, no one other than the researcher, school-based administrator, and the teacher participants knew the scope of the study.

Administrators were offered a script to share with other staff informing them of the researcher's presence in their building (Appendix E). The four teacher participants were also given a script which was read to their students (Appendix F), and a letter, which was sent home to parents and guardians (Appendix G). These communications advised teachers, students, and families of the researcher's presence in the classroom and the teachers' participation in a study about the lives and practices of ECTs. All letters advised students, families, and staff that no one other than the teacher was the focus of the study and that no identifying information about students or the schools would be published.

### ***Interviews***

Interviews were semi-structured, meaning that there were few questions planned at the outset and that each question remained open-ended in nature to promote discourse and allow for follow up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This style of interviewing was referred to by Rubin and Rubin as "a responsive interviewing style" (p. 31), and it allowed for the free flow of ideas to be exchanged through conversation. The guiding questions allowed the participants to take the interviews in any direction they wanted. The semi-structured and open-ended style of interviewing allowed for the teachers' personalities and relative qualities to be revealed. Each interview was scheduled to last approximately one hour, though interviews ranged between 45

and 90 minutes in length. The interviews were scheduled directly before or after a half-day classroom observation (lasting approximately 2 – 3 hours). Time permitting, they sometimes took place both before and after the observation. Interviews were private, took place in the teacher's classroom, and were recorded on a password protected iPhone device before being transcribed.

The following list of questions was kept with the researcher and referred to, as needed, throughout the interviews. Because of the conversational nature of this interview style the participants did not receive all the questions in exactly the same order. In the end, however, all four participants answered each of the questions in one form or another:

1. Why did you choose to participate in this study?
2. What is your current level of confidence in your role as an educator?
3. What contributes to (or has contributed to) your level of confidence (i.e. personality, experience, etc.)?
  - a. Where did you learn the skills and strategies you use in practice?
  - b. Do you have any experiences outside of formal schooling that support your skills as a teacher?
    - i. Personal experiences;
    - ii. Professional development opportunities and choices;
    - iii. Academic background;
4. Describe the demographics of your current classroom (including but not limited to):
  - a. Behaviour
  - b. Learning
  - c. Mental health

5. Describe your current management routines or concerns (with respect to learning, behaviours, or mental health):
  - a. How are issues or concerns managed?
  - b. How do issues or concerns impact the learning environment (for both teacher and students)?

The open-ended nature of the questions allowed for a wide array of answers and took the discussion in different directions. In order to develop themes and ideas relevant to all, notes of early impressions were kept. These notes evolved into a second list of questions that were used in the final interview to ensure consistency across all four participants. As the final interview for each participant approached, field notes were reviewed and this list of final questions was refined. The questions (Appendix J) pertained to demographical information; they also spanned contexts from personal history to future directions for the educators. There were twenty-one collated questions, used as a guide during the final interview (Appendix J). Not all follow-up questions were asked of each participant, as topics for discussion depended on whether or not they had been previously discussed. During the final interview the participants were granted the opportunity to share their final thoughts.

### ***Observations***

Wolcott (2005) described field work as both “an artistic undertaking as well as a scientific one” (p. 3), further stating that observation is the heart of all qualitative research (Wolcott, 2008). In terms of protocol for observations conducted as field work, Wolcott (2005) stated “not everything needs to be counted and measured, or changed and improved, to conform to our standards, our ways. Artists portray. That is what fieldwork is all about” (p. 7). With an artistic overture in mind, much can be left to the discretion of the researcher when it comes to

what actions are observed or how those actions are interpreted. In this case, the research questions served as observational protocol (Creswell, 2013), and they were kept close during observations, which helped to focus attention on the research goals and the nuances of the classroom.

As an educator who has spent the better half of two decades in classrooms, there were advantages and disadvantages to my capabilities as an observer. First, I was uniquely positioned to understand classroom life. I could recognize pedagogical decisions, understand rationale for particular practices, and notice certain nuances, be they related to teaching, managing behaviour, learning, or assessment. However, my familiarity with the profession of teaching may have served as a disadvantage, as there could have been nuances of the space, or interactions among teacher and student, that I missed. Each observation was followed by a short discussion, and these discussions served as an informal debriefing. All interactions were recorded with the permission of the participant except classroom observations, which were not recorded.

### ***Reflections***

The process of journaling and reflecting on interactions throughout the research process can serve as integral to the construction of knowledge. Fosnot and Perry (1996) have this to say on the subject of reflecting:

Reflective abstraction is the driving force of learning. As meaning makers, humans seek to organize and generalize across experiences in a representational form. Allowing reflection time through journal writing, representation in multi-symbolic form, and/or discussing connections across experiences or strategies may facilitate reflective abstraction. (p. 34).

The thoughts and ideas that originated during or immediately upon completing sessions with the participants were valuable and in addition to all conversations being recorded and transcribed, written as field notes (Maharaj, 2016), and journal reflections captured the nuances of these intimate moments. Smith (1999) stated “extracts from the journal create an audit trail of my reasoning, judgement, and emotional reactions to the stories related by participants” (p. 360). Field notes supported the journal as a reminder and a guide. Both field notes and journal reflections were coded separately from the participant transcript data, yet compared in the final phases of thematic analysis. This iterative-constructive practice supported the holistic construction of knowledge around the *how*, *what*, and *why* of particular behaviours and decisions that supported a thriving practice as the teachers prepared, taught, managed, and related to others in their classrooms.

### **Analysis**

Guided by case study methodology (Creswell, 2013) and the use of a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013), developed themes among the ECTs’ accounts and experiences were coded and reviewed from text. Interview transcripts, field notes, and journal reflections contributed to the findings of this work. Coding was completed by the researcher, both by hand and through the support of a computer-generated coding program called NVivo, allowing for participant voice to contribute throughout. A rigorous process of analysis supported the development of themes in an approach that followed six phases of iterative interaction with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Appendix K). Commonalities among each teacher’s practice were categorized early in the data collection process and produced a socially constructed summary of the teacher’s knowledge, skills, and attitudes as they presented over this period of time. This investigation into the early field experiences of four Saskatchewan teachers, shares findings that

present common features of the teacher's personality, followed by domains for further exploration in teacher training and induction. Findings and implications contribute to defining a set of skills that may promote a thriving career.

Observation and interview data were collected from each teacher and classroom, on several occasions, and through various methods. These records supported triangulation between each participant's interview and the researcher's reflections (Denzin, 2009). In qualitative, constructivist case study research, all forms of data provide an opportunity for the construction of knowledge, which form multiple perspectives (Stake, 1995) and are based on multiple realities (Merriam, 1988). In each case, the final report of the findings considered data regarding participant and researcher perspectives that resulted in subjective accounts of feelings, interpretations, and events. In other words, it was assumed that there was no one truth which would prevail; instead multiple truths existed among the participants, the researcher and their interpretations. For this reason, sharing findings with another researcher in order to provide further analysis, interpretation, or triangulation was deemed unnecessary.

The participants reviewed the transcript data and a rough draft of Chapters Four and Five, and each provided input and feedback relevant to their words and identified themes. Each agreed with initial interpretations and findings, and only minor changes were made to transcripts.

Regarding interpretive decisions, Ponterotto (2005) stated the following:

A constructivist–interpretivist researcher may interview only a handful of clients for longer periods of time and when analyzing the transcript data will not seek other researcher consensus on identified themes. The point here is that there are multiple meanings of a phenomenon in the minds of people who experience it as well as multiple interpretations of the data (multiple realities); the researcher neither attempts to unearth a

single “truth” from the realities of participants nor tries to achieve outside verification of his or her analysis. Thus, it is irrelevant whether a different researcher looking at the same typed interview transcripts arrives at different themes. Both may be correct, and the reader should judge the rigor of the study on the basis of its thick description. (p. 130)

Merriam (1998) had this to say on the process: “making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning” (p. 178). The analyses presented in Chapter Four are the researcher’s interpretations of an inquiry that was based on the subjective realities of the participants. The four classrooms provided a variety of contexts from which student and teacher dynamics were observed, and it was through these collective cases that meaning was constructed and interpreted based on life experiences that were unique to the time and place of this project.

### **Thematic Analysis**

Braun and Clarke (2006) defined a process known as thematic analysis (TA), which provided details to approach data rigorously and constructively. This process is summarized in Table 3.2 and also seen in a 15-point checklist of criteria for good TA (Appendix K). Their *Phases of Thematic Analysis* approaches data from a constructivist perspective, whereby “meaning and experience are socially produced and reproduced” (p. 14) through six phases of engagement with the data. Braun and Clarke (2019) suggest that TA “is best thought of as an umbrella term for a set of approaches for analysing qualitative data that share a focus on identifying themes (patterns of meaning)” (para. 2); these patterns support considerations, but not generalizations.

Braun and Clarke’s (2006) 15-point checklist for TA (Appendix K) clarifies qualities of, and guiding principles for, managing data thematically, and their guide was used to support the

rigorous and methodical process of analysis outlined in Chapter Four. In short, these guidelines reflect key principles to guide qualitative analysis: organization and structure, management of data, presentation of findings, use of participant narratives, consistency with respect to claims or explanations, language and report writing, and the importance of epistemological positioning to frame the process from beginning to end.

**Table 3.2**

*Braun and Clarke's Phases of Thematic Analysis*

Phase 1: Familiarizing Yourself with the Data	Transcription; reading; re-reading; writing down initial ideas.
Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes	Coding interesting features; collating data across the set.
Phase 3: Searching for Themes	Collating codes into potential themes; gathering all data relevant to themes.
Phase 4: Reviewing Themes	Checking if themes relate to coded extracts; compare to entire data set; generate a thematic map.
Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes	On-going analysis to refine themes; looking to overall story being developed; refining, defining, and naming themes.
Phase 6: Producing a Report	The final opportunity for analysis; selection of vivid, compelling, extract examples relating to research question, literature and producing a scholarly report.

*Note:* Table adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006)

Classification and coding of noted themes evolved through a process of analysis and reflection (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2013). Some themes evolved early, by looking to notes and reflections, while others were constructed or built over time. This inductive approach to creating and refining categories, making meaning, and coding themes was thorough and methodical (Creswell, 2013). The documentation (field notes, recordings, journal reflections) was key in all phases of this research and this process supported transparency, validity, authenticity, and reliability (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). In one final phase of data analysis, an electronic computer-assisted qualitative data coding system supported analysis for comparison of themes (NVivo). A process known as cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2007),

supported coding, categorizing, and comparison of themes across each of the four cases. The process and resulting narratives, described in detail in Chapter Four, helped to provide a transparent evolution of the themes that resulted from a subjective analysis of the actions, behaviours and attributes of the ECTs.

Braun and Clarke (2006) have extensively outlined TA and the theory, application, and evaluation of TA as “a foundational method for qualitative analysis” (p. 4). They describe TA as a “complex account of data” and further note that “qualitative psychologists need to be clear about what they are doing and why, and include the often-omitted, *how* they did their analysis in their reports” (p. 5). For this reason, the analysis of data is extensively outlined through the six phases in Chapter Four, along with the findings. Braun and Clarke (2006) state:

If we do not know how people went about analysing their data, or what assumptions informed their analysis, it is difficult to evaluate their research, and to compare and/or synthesise it with other studies on that topic, and it can impede other researchers carrying out related projects in the future. (p. 7)

The method intertwines the researchers process and accounts as they develop themes from research documents.

### **Positionality**

The themes explored in Chapter Four are a result of an iterative process of engagement with the data, and each was developed considering social constructivism as an epistemological standpoint that aligned the researcher’s perspective with the themes emerging from the work.

Ponterotto, (2005) described this process as constructivist-interpretivist:

Constructivists–interpretivists maintain that the researcher’s values and lived experience cannot be divorced from the research process. The researcher should acknowledge,

describe, and “bracket” his or her values, but not eliminate them. Keep in mind that the epistemology underlying a constructivist position requires close, prolonged interpersonal contact with the participants in order to facilitate their construction and expression of the “lived experience” being studied. (p. 126)

The use of Braun and Clarke’s approach to thematic analysis allowed for a transparent look at the process of constructing themes from this research and the details provide an outline of how the participants’ words and actions led to findings and considerations for future practice.

Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) wrote that positionality “reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study” (p. 71); researchers can situate themselves within the research context in relation to the subject of the work, the participants within the study, or the research process or context itself. Though it has been noted that some elements of positionality are by choice, many aspects of one’s position remain fixed, inherent in who and how the researcher defines one’s self. These qualifications can be reflective of gender, orientation, culture, ethnicity, age, and experience, among other things. Heigham and Croker (2009) shared the following:

When researchers go into research settings, they also take their own intellectual baggage and life experiences with them. Inevitably, their gender, age, ethnicity, cultural background, sexual orientation, politics, religious beliefs, and life experiences – their worldview – are the lens through which they see their research. This may color their perceptions of the research setting and also the constructions of reality that they develop with the participants. This is a major concern in qualitative research, so it is important for researchers to be constantly aware and systematically reflect on their own personal identity and impact on the participants and research setting. (p. 11)

It must be acknowledged throughout this qualitative analysis that my own history, experience, and connection to the topic of study, informed the research in all phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As a subjective outsider, my personal and professional experiences lend credence to this journey and my position, as part of the construction of content, was unavoidable.

### **Bracketing**

Bracketing yourself from the research involves “identifying your own assumptions and then putting them aside”; this can be “hard to do, but [is] vitally important for being able to get deep into qualitative data” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pp. 8–9). As a novice researcher, while I acknowledge the value of my position and experience as an educator with respect to this work, I recognize both the need and difficulty in separating my opinions and interpretations from the research. During the coding phase, entire phrases were highlighted and grouped, per participant in order to best “capture the meanings inherent in the [participants’] experience”. I then employed what Stringer (2014) calls the “verbatim principle” (p. 140); meaning, I used as much of the participants’ words and phrases as possible in presenting the findings and thematic analysis (as seen in Chapter Four). In constructive qualitative work, it remains impossible to completely bracket yourself from the data because “the researcher is the instrument for analysis across all phases of a qualitative research project. This subjective endeavor entails the inevitable transmission of assumptions, values, interests, emotions and theories” (Tufford & Newman, 2012, p. 81). Separating myself from the data and emerging themes was not possible; however, my position has been acknowledged, and the participants’ voices are heard through detailed verbatim accounts.

## **Assumptions**

Regarding the school-based administrators who were sent the request for this study, the following assumptions were made:

- School-based administrators would be familiar with the goals and standards set for Saskatchewan teachers (Appendices A, B, & C), and would use those standards as defining measures of competence;
- School-based administrators would forward the study to competent and thriving ECTs in their schools;
- School-based administrators would abide by the ethical protocol outlined; meaning, they would not share the particulars of the study with teachers to whom it was not forwarded (see Ethics, Chapter Three);
- There would be no pressure on teachers to volunteer, and should they be forwarded the study they would choose, on their own, to contact the researcher.

Next, assumptions were made about the ECTs who were sent the request for this study:

- The ECTs who responded to the study volunteered to do so out of interest, rather than pressure;
- The ECTs felt confident and competent in their practice as teachers, as defined by provincial standards, and felt they were thriving as professionals in their practice;
- The ECTs would express opinions, feelings, and experiences with honesty and openness;
- The ECTs would not share the particulars of the study with colleagues.

## **Delimitations**

The scope of this study pertained to the lives of competent and thriving ECTs only. The research looked to competent and thriving teachers in this portion of the population in order to

learn from their knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as displayed in practice and shared through conversation-style interviews. In addition, the study looked to volunteers from only one school division and specifically sought out four ECTs who worked in elementary schools only. It was considered that participants from a different population of teachers, from that which the researcher worked directly, would limit the likelihood that the researcher and teacher volunteers would know one another.

### **Limitations**

The pool of volunteers was from one of the largest school divisions in the province, with over 2500 professional and support staff; however, the participants were from four of a possible fifty elementary schools. This study was qualitative in nature and sought to learn from the experiences and perspectives of a small group of thriving ECTs in Saskatchewan. Though a qualitative study was chosen for its advantages in gathering rich and detailed data from a small group of participants, some perceive sample size as a limitation. Inherent in any research that deals specifically with a limited number of participants is the limitation of generalization and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the aptly titled chapter “The Only Generalization is, There is No Generalization”, from Lincoln and Guba’s book, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, the authors noted that even within highly scrutinized, rigorous, and large quantitative studies, resulting data does not necessarily apply in any other circumstance.

Being that this study focused on four educators from one school division, it was not assumed that the data was reflective of, nor transferable to, any other circumstance. The results have been used in comparison to aligning literature to support areas for future development. The participant demographic represented what Braun and Clarke (2013) call *usual suspects*. Though

not intentional, each of the four participants was “educated, white, middle class, and straight,” representing a demographic that also tends to make up the bulk of psychological research (p. 58).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Both the participants’ and their contributions to this work are confidential, and each was protected by the use of a pseudonym throughout. The teachers were not anonymous participants, however. School administrators were asked to make the study known to their school staff, which was done so that the presence of a researcher would not be questioned or raise concerns in the schools. Staff in schools were informed that they could bring questions or concerns about the process to their administrators, and in this case, none did. Since this study intended to investigate the practices of ECTs who were selected by their school-based administrators for being competent and thriving professionals, the potential for discomfort among the participants was recognized; if the participants’ colleagues discovered the particulars of the study, this may have been a compromising factor for all involved. To mitigate discomfort or awkwardness, ethical requirements were discussed with school-based administrators and participants, and these were written into ethics approval documents (Appendix G).

The administrators and ECTs were asked to keep confidential any specifics of the study that may compromise relationships within the school, or otherwise contribute to colleagues within the school feeling disapproved of or ranked. When informing their staff about a researcher being present in the building, administrators were instructed to use a script which did not share that participating teachers were chosen for being competent and thriving (Appendix F). Participation and study particulars were also discussed with the participants during the first meeting, and, for the above reasons, they were also asked not to share study particulars with their colleagues.

In addition to the moral considerations regarding how the participants came to be part of this study, the schools and communities in which participants were employed were not named or identified. All contextual or identifiable factors were removed from quotes and phrases used in the findings, and the participants were not discussed with identifying features included in their narratives. This measure protected teachers from being identified, mitigating any possible attention from within their school or community regarding their participation. This measure also respected comments, opinions, and emotions shared during the interviews and allowed for open and honest conversations.

Consent was obtained from the participants in writing during the first meeting, at which time a letter and script were given, highlighting the teacher's participation (Appendix F). The letter, written for parents and families, included the information that the study was about early career teaching, and it noted that neither the students nor the community were a focus. In addition, no photographs or names of children were used while capturing the experiences of these teachers. The discussion around consent also outlined that there were no expectations for participation and that participants could withdraw at any time before the end of data collection (June, 2019). All documents pertaining to participants contribution were to be destroyed should they have chosen to withdraw before the end date; however, not if they withdrew after data analysis had begun. Though confidentiality was upheld, the participants were fully apprised of any vulnerabilities due to the limits of anonymity within the school setting and each of the participants signed consent forms with full knowledge of the particulars of the work. To my knowledge, all participants complied with the ethical guidelines and no compromising situations arose. Lastly, the participants in this study were volunteers and were not compensated in any way for their contribution to this work; however, each was made aware that their contributions

provided valuable information to a growing body of research around thriving in the early years of teaching.

### **Summary**

In the spring of 2019, four ECTs who were considered to be competent and thriving in their practice were invited to participate in this qualitative case study. They were informed that the project results might provide an understanding of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of competent and thriving teachers and could contribute to the literature on teacher training, retention, and quality practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Administrators were asked to review teacher competencies, as defined by provincial standards (Appendices A, B, & C), and forward the study on to ECTs in their building who they felt were meeting these expectations and thriving in their careers.

A qualitative and constructive case study approach provided a flexible and versatile design from which to engage the early career teachers and methodological choices provided an opportunity for both teachers and the researcher to contribute as reflective practitioners. From this research, experiences and perspectives were shared with openness and honesty, and the qualitative framework provided an opportunity to glean rich, descriptive data, allowing the voices of the participants to be a strong feature of the work. The following chapter shares the findings of four teachers who came forward following the initial contact to administrators. As thriving practitioners, each promoted safe and well-managed learning environments and maintained practices that supported their students' well-being. Their work on this project provided insight into their practice, along with valuable information about the needs of the profession that may support ECTs to thrive as they enter their career.

## CHAPTER 4

### Analysis and Findings

With the knowledge that as many as one third to one half of educators leave the profession early in their career, it was decided that research into the skills and practices of early career teachers (ECTs) who were thriving, based on provincial measures of success, could provide a unique and insightful perspective on their needs and strengths within the profession of teaching. In the spring of 2019, four ECTs were recruited to share their knowledge, skills, and attitudes (competencies) as thriving Saskatchewan educators. The competencies and goals for best practice, which guided the recruitment process, were defined by provincial goals and standards of practice in the province of Saskatchewan (Appendices A & B), regulated by the Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board (SPTRB, Appendix C), and developed in pre-service teacher education programs as goals for best practice (Table 3.1). The goals are outlined in Chapter Three and reflect four domains: Goal 1, Personal and Professional Competencies; Goal 2, Knowledge Competencies; Goal 3, Instructional Competencies; and Goal 4, Curricular Competencies. These goals and competencies contributed, in part, to the development of the research questions:

1. What knowledge, skills, or attitudes (competencies) do thriving ECTs possess?
2. How does the development of particular knowledge, skills, or attitudes (competencies) contribute to thriving in the profession of teaching?
3. How was the knowledge, skills, or attitudes (competencies) present in the thriving ECTs attained or refined?

In addition, sub-questions, also developed based on goals and standards for competence in Saskatchewan, helped to support interviews and observations. These questions looked to

understand the ways that the teachers constructed knowledge, made decisions, and interacted in the classroom:

- a. How do the ECTs prepare and set up their learning environments (i.e. teach, manage resources, assess)?
- b. How do the ECTs construct pedagogical knowledge or beliefs and use that information to make decisions about their practice?
- c. How do the ECTs manage the classroom (i.e. safety, learning, behaviour, comfort)?
- d. How do the ECTs relate and interact with students and build relationships within the context of their classrooms?

This chapter uniquely combines the process of thematic analysis with the findings in a review that details how the four educators contributed to thematic development. This process is imperative to the findings as it shows the contributions of the researcher and participants as co-constructors in the sense that the participants' voices meld with the researcher's analysis to present an authentic representation of the findings from the review of field notes, journals, and transcripts. Braun and Clarke (2006) note that an immersion and description of the process together is vital.

### **Participants**

Within 24 hours of the first email being sent to school administrators, three participants reached out by phone or email to set up a meeting. Within another week, a fourth participant came forward. No additional educators came forward, no participants were turned away, and no participants dropped out of the study. The four ECTs were each given a pseudonym from the first point of contact, and for the duration of the study, which supported organization and anonymity. The pseudonym was given by the researcher and was chosen by selecting a random

letter of the alphabet and then assigning a name. No identifiable information pertaining to the participant's identity was kept or used. The participants are presented in this chapter: Participant 1, Beth; Participant 2, Camille; Participant 3, Laura; and Participant 4, Sara.

As noted in the section on study limitations (Chapter One), each of the participants was female. The fact that the participants were all female was not surprising, as women make up approximately 73% of the teacher workforce in Saskatchewan (Statistics Canada, 2019). The participants welcomed the opportunity to partake in research wholeheartedly, providing a window into their lives as classroom teachers. Each participant also shared personal and professional goals, challenges, needs, grievances, and experiences with respect to teaching and learning. Because each participant shared so openly, expressing emotions, stressful events, and intimate details about their schools, homes, and work lives, no identifying information has been tied to any one participant. In addition, identifiable information pertaining to specific school contexts has not been shared. Free flowing conversations brought forth uninhibited opinions, recollections, and emotions, providing for rich detail. Resulting themes reflected the teachers' personalities, pedagogies, and practices in their efforts to affect safe, well-managed learning environments for themselves and their students.

All ethical protocols outlined in the previous sections were adhered to throughout. The first step with the participants involved a review of the standards and goals for educators (Appendices A, B, & C), and this was completed just before the first formal interview. It was also discussed at this time that the initial email to administrators asked for the study to be brought to the attention of any ECTs who were competent and thriving in the first five years of their practice. The teachers were asked to keep these particulars of the study to themselves, in case there were colleagues in their buildings to whom the study had not been brought up; each

participant agreed to do this. Research from the Canadian Teacher's Federation (2014) and other Canadian groups, which spoke to the large numbers of teachers who leave the profession early in their career (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019), was discussed with the participants. It was acknowledged that this study may provide insight in support of early career teacher preparation and the teaching profession in general.

From the beginning, the teachers displayed excitement around this research opportunity and showed both competence and confidence throughout the duration of our time together. Each teacher had a diverse background and utilized skill sets and practices that were unique. The participants noted that the standards and goals reviewed were either familiar or typical of what was expected of them in their role: Beth, "I think that essentially these standards of practice are what inform our evaluations for the first two years"; Camille, "it all looks pretty standard to me." Overall, there were no surprises. The teachers felt the competencies (Appendix C) and their administrators' evaluation of them as competent were fair. Upon reviewing the standards and discussing competencies, the participants spoke about their interest in the study and shared some of their background and experience. From these early meetings, many commonalities, other than gender and a keen interest in research were noted. These connections are explored next.

### ***Background and Experience***

The four participants were all women, elementary school teachers, and under the age of 30. Each had come to the profession of teaching with diverse backgrounds and experiences and each had been teaching somewhere between two and five years at the time of the study. Two of the participants were general classroom teachers with 28 to 30 students in their classrooms each. The other two were resource teachers with various classroom duties and experiences as well as case loads that supported mostly middle-year students or, in some cases, the entire school. The

teachers had a variety of experiences working with small and large groups, in co-teaching environments, as well as teaching in general classrooms or special education settings.

The participant's undergraduate B.Ed. degrees were obtained from institutions across Canada, spanning three provinces: Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. The women were keen educators and lifelong learners, each having completed more than one degree or specialization to support their early career work. The qualifications noted among them, in addition to a B.Ed. included one teacher who had a previous degree in the Sciences and one teacher who held a Special Education Certification. Three of the four had either obtained a Master's degree or were nearing its completion. One participant had a Master's degree in counselling psychology, and each of the ECTs expressed an interest in continuing their education, either informally through professional development, or via personal interests. One teacher was interested in embarking on a path to obtain a doctorate in Education.

These teachers valued education highly. They spoke favourably of their parents, family members, professors, administrators, colleagues, and friends, who served as mentors in their lives. The four participants were keenly interested in the research process and the potential benefits of research for educators and the profession. I felt honoured that these four educators took the steps to make contact, sharing their time with a stranger to reflect on some of the most intimate parts of their daily lives. Each navigated both the excitement and trepidations of teaching with grace. Some lessons and activities observed were awe inspiring, while others were quite routine. Nonetheless, each worked with energy and finesse and each seemed to have an innate ability to face and reframe stress, manage adversity, and focus on the positive impact they could have on their students.

### *School Contexts*

The participants taught in different urban school settings with various degrees of social, cultural, academic, and economic diversity. The teachers were employed in schools with diverse programming options, languages, supports, and resources. Two of the schools were located in middle income neighbourhoods, one school was located in a middle to upper income neighborhood, and one school was located in an inner-city, lower income neighbourhood. Though each school offered a diverse demographic of students, they all had moderate to high needs with respect to the students in the school. The schools offered various options to meet the diverse students' needs: language immersion programs; outdoor education programs; special education programs for struggling learners, which supported academic, behavioural, and social-emotional well-being; and free school breakfast or lunch programs. The dynamics across each of the schools were similar in that the needs were high and resources low. Nevertheless, each teacher made do with parent volunteers, community resources, and minimal support from educational assistants (EAs). In addition, the ECTs had unique teaching styles, creative ideas, and professional development interests that strengthened their engagement with students. All participants had an ability to motivate and engage students in dynamic ways, and their classrooms were anything but traditional, with a variety of seating options and workspaces. Low lighting, comfortable corners to hide and work, and freedom to move about the room were all options which the teachers used to support their students. Students in each of their classes worked as pairs, groups, or as individuals, and during each observation it seemed music, dance, drama, or activity were common to support authentic, engaging, and exciting learning opportunities.

## **A Construction of Themes: From Thematic Analysis to Findings**

This section presents a synopsis of the findings from a qualitative case study, which took place within a social constructivist framework. The process of arriving at the findings was rigorous and involved a constructive and inductive approach to thematic data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Findings stemmed from several interactions with the above-noted participants, through a total of four interviews and four classroom observations spanning three months. During each visit, participants met privately with the researcher in their classrooms, and the time spent together involved semi-structured, recorded interviews that lasted approximately one hour, in addition to a classroom observation. Observations and interviews took place on the same day, and each lasted approximately one half day in total. The work was documented and included field notes, journal reflections, and transcript data. Recorded interviews were reviewed multiple times and the researcher's notes and reflections helped to track developing themes. These notes first led to early impressions and later to categories and themes. The majority of data analyzed was that of the transcribed interviews. The entire process supported the development of themes over a period of several months and, therefore, this section combines analysis with findings through the phases of engagement with the data, providing an outline of how themes developed and changed with each phase.

Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis (TA) as an analytic method that offers “an accessible, theoretically flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data” (p. 77). In order for the method to achieve the rigour of quality research, Braun and Clarke (2006) also noted TA as a method that must be conducted deliberately, thoughtfully, and with an attention to thorough documentation and process. As an introduction to the findings, the process that contributed to the development of themes within this research is presented as it unfolded through the six phases

outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) in Table 3.2. Approaching the data through phases allowed for an iterative and constructive analysis, whereby meaning was sought within the words and phrases used by the participants. This method is shared here as both an analysis and findings as the two contribute to a transparent review of the process. Several engagements with the text, as seen through the phases, ensured an authentic and detailed coding process and provided an account of the rigorous methods that contributed to thematic development.

Though the language of emerging themes has been used intermittently, Braun and Clarke (2006) are careful to point out that themes do not merely emerge; the researcher constructs them through a compelling and rigorous process that allows them to develop (Appendix K). By utilizing Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases to show how the process unfolds, issues of transparency, data interaction, and the emergence of well-developed themes are addressed. The six phases serve as sub-headings throughout this section and are as follows: 1) familiarization with the data; 2) generation of initial codes; 3) a search for themes; 4) a review of themes; 5) defining and naming themes; 6) the production of a report (Table 3.2).

### **Phase 1: Familiarizing Yourself with the Data**

Familiarization began early and happened alongside data collection. Step one of this process included reflecting on field notes and engaging weekly with journaling, and it resulted in early impressions which are explored first before detailing the phases. This phase was completed throughout and involved listening to and reflecting on conversations and reading journaling notes. On the day of an interview, and sometimes immediately following an interview and classroom observation, interview recordings would be played back and thoughtfully considered with questions and ideas noted. This phase helped to capture and describe the culture and

context, i.e. sensations, feelings, moods, and emotions, among other related perceptions of the time spent with each participant; however, no transcription took place during this time.

### *Early Impressions*

On the value of early impressions, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) wrote the following:

“Observers need to be open to early impressions and feelings about what is going on in a setting because it is these early impressions that help determine subsequent patterns and themes” (p. 140). During early interactions with field notes and journal reflections, five topics were noted repeatedly. These topics were seen in the teachers’ openness and willingness to share what were sometimes intimate details and perspectives on their own lives and the profession of teaching. Though formal analysis had not yet begun, the following five categories were noted among the early interactions with the participants:

1. **Mental Health and Stress:** This was a concern highlighted for both the students and teachers; in addition, contributions to stress, and how stress was managed, were discussed a great deal among the participants.
2. **Passion and Enthusiasm for the Profession:** The participants had a great deal of passion for teaching and attended to their role and their responsibilities with respect to a myriad of student needs. Each was involved in committee work and extra-curricular activities.
3. **Highly Educated:** All four participants held degrees or specializations other than their B.Ed.; each participated in professional development or took advantage of leadership roles and learning opportunities and valued lifelong learning as a mark of excellent teaching.

4. **Research Interest:** Each participant had a keen interest in research and how research could support the profession of teaching.
5. **Importance of Mentors:** Each participant spoke highly of their leaders and mentors and had positive, clearly defined, reciprocal relationships with their administrators and colleagues. They also spoke about themselves as mentors or leaders as well.

Along with these impressions, questions about the participants and their relationships were noted:

1. **Questions about the Participants:** Who volunteered and why? How did their level of education and interest in research contribute or matter to their participation in this study? How were commonalities among them relevant to this work (such as insight, curiosity, interest, energy, persistence, ability to reframe the negative and focus on the positive)?
2. **Questions about Relationships:** Were administrators who had good relationships with their new teachers the only ones to forward the study on and encourage participation? If so, what were the qualities of a good administrative team? How does leadership or mentorship style impact the potential of an ECT to thrive? Did the quality of leadership even matter? In addition, the participants also each had camaraderie, kinship, and mentorship among their colleagues; what was the impact of these relationships on their level of competency or confidence in their role?

The early impressions were the beginning stages of an iterative construction of findings and would later rely on the formal process of coding of transcripts. Early impressions are important, because they serve to support a scaffolded (i.e. foundational support and understanding) and growing engagement with ideas emerging from the work (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Though separated from the later phases of thematic data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), these early

impressions and questions were not ignored as they helped to define overall patterns and themes (Fosnot & Perry, 1996; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Once data collection was complete, the next step was to re-read field notes and journal reflections, and listen to each recorded interview once more. During this phase all four interviews were listened to, by participant, and in succession. A separate narrative of each participant began to emerge and these initial concepts were mapped. The last step completed during this phase was transcription, from which further familiarization with the content of the interviews resulted, though this step was more methodical. Personally engaging with the data in this manner was an ethical responsibility and it supported confidentiality; however, it also allowed for multiple opportunities to engage with the spoken words and their meaning in the context of each conversation. Using functions available in Word (Microsoft Office), the transcribed text was then organized into rows, to separate the interviewer's words from the interviewee's. The text was then centred into three columns creating a table. The participants' transcriptions were in the centre of the table and a blank column was left on either side, to allow for space for notes on one side and codes on the other. At this stage, the transcripts were sent to the participants for their approval, allowing additions, changes, or feedback.

Once the participants had provided input, the transcripts were listened to and read once more. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) call this phase of data analysis "hearing what was said" (p. 64). While early impressions had been identified, this was a methodical process built upon "organizing relevant text into repeating ideas" and paying attention to their meanings (p. 64). The columnar format of the text allowed for corresponding ideas to be noted. Identifiable themes began to form the foundation for "repeated ideas" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 55). These ideas would return later, in a line by line analysis of the transcripts, which was completed next (Braun

& Clarke, 2013). Notes about tone, emotion, or context were made at this point, and any mistakes in transcription were also corrected. Listening to, reading, and revising the transcripts provided a rigorous final product with a “thorough orthographic, verbatim account of all verbal (and sometimes nonverbal [e.g., coughs]) utterances” that captured as much of the nuances of conversation and tone as possible (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88).

## **Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes**

Once familiar with the content, tone, and context of the interviews, the printed transcripts provided the only form of data engagement moving forward. The format used to code the transcripts was a process known as open coding (Saldana, 2015). Open coding involved “labelling concepts, defining, and developing categories based on their properties and dimensions” (Khandkar, 2009, p. 1). Two types of codes were used at this stage, In vivo codes and researcher constructed or descriptive codes (Saldana, 2015). In vivo codes, tracked in a column to the left of the transcripts, pulled individual words or short phrases from the participants’ quotes. In the column on the right-side descriptions or ideas constructed by the researcher were noted. In this phase, transcripts were read through in two cycles (Saldana, 2015), once to pull out codes and note ideas and a second time to review and highlight sections of corresponding text that could later be used to complement the findings and authenticate themes.

## **Phase 3: Searching for Themes**

Next, codes and passages were transferred from a Word document to colour-coded sticky notes. One colour was assigned to each participant so they could eventually be mixed together while still revealing which ideas came from whom. This organizational feature was implemented in order to be able to see, at a glance, if each participant had contributed to the development of themes or if certain themes were heavily reliant on one person’s input or perspective. This

feature also supported later searches for quotes from the transcripts as they would be needed to support the findings. The codes, grouped by participant, were posted on a white board, allowing for a large visual way to engage with the presenting ideas. Viewing the codes in this manner supported the development of categories. Grouped by participant, these categories represented similar ideas. Previously constructed concept maps and other notes from the early impressions were brought into this process and reflected upon as distinct categories and themes became clear. The large display of four participants, and approximately seven common categories between them each were arranged on the wall. The array was left displayed for several days and reviewed later with a fresh perspective from which the seven categories were checked for redundancy and subsequently narrowed to five. Every code from the initial round of data analysis fit into one of the following five categories:

1. **Positive Sense of Self:** This included self-care practices, attention to personal needs, knowledge of limits and boundaries, growth-oriented perspectives, resilience and strength, and thoughtful attitudes.
2. **Importance of Mentorship and Role Models:** Themes included the importance of good leaders; collegial camaraderie; parents, family, or friends who supported growth and learning; giving and receiving relevant advice.
3. **Pedagogy and Practice:** These included relationship-based management, student-centered decision making; and use of resources that supported both students and teacher; risk taking; creativity, inquiry and project-based learning.
4. **Perspective and Awareness:** This included the overall landscape of teaching; the distinct features of teaching in the twenty-first century; needs of self, other teachers, and

students; needs of teacher candidates (TCs) and ECTs in general; necessary and relevant professional development for TCs or ECTs.

5. **Prominent Issues or Concerns:** This included issues pertaining to class size, mental health, stress or burnout, supporting students with exceptionalities, concerns around the impact of poverty on students and their families, social justice concerns, and classroom management concerns.

#### **Phase 4: Reviewing Themes**

The above noted categories, which by this point had been devised via hundreds of sticky notes, were arranged and rearranged. The categories were then typed and grouped in a table. In this phase, the categories were further narrowed. The codes remaining in each theme were counted and named to assess which themes presented with the most codes. Though counting codes was not necessarily a measure of significance in qualitative work, it was completed nonetheless (Saldana, 2015). Through this process of organization, the themes morphed once again and they became more clear.

The final stage of this phase was to name the themes and order them from themes with the most codes to those with the least, in case that had any impact on the final analysis. The themes were compared to the research questions and the decision to name them pertained to how each contributed to either knowledge, skills, or attitudes the participants possessed:

1. **Awareness (271 codes):** Attention and attunement to needs, issues, or concerns.
2. **Resilience (258 codes):** Ability to cope and manage with adversity and/or stress.
3. **Relationship (165 codes):** Importance of interactions and care for self and others.
4. **Pedagogy and Practice (118 codes):** Personal and professional practices, decisions, resources, ideals, or philosophical orientation.

By working through the first four phases in Braun and Clarke's (2006) model, the data had been through an exhaustive and extensive analysis. The themes were representative of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of each teacher and they attended to features of personality or nuances of practice that were only beginning to take shape at this stage.

### **Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes**

In this fifth step, a qualitative data analysis tool, called NVivo, was used as a way to refine, define, and name what would become the final themes. NVivo software was available through a licensing agreement at the University of Saskatchewan, and it was relatively easy to navigate and learn. NVivo provided a way to organize and formally map all potential themes. This mapping served as an opportunity to refine data analysis, and it helped to avoid what Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to as some of the common problems identified with thematic analysis: transparency, weak data interaction, and the potential for poorly developed themes.

The transcripts were edited in this phase to separate the researcher's voice (questions, connections, reflections), leaving only the words of the participants in the uploaded documents to start. Transcripts were coded separate from field notes and journal reflections, in order to create a data set that first reflected the participants' voices. This two-step process of looking at just the transcripts and then at coded notes and reflections in NVivo helped to produce a refined list of 125 codes. Each code was then analyzed for reoccurring, relevant, or relatable themes using the tools offered within NVivo: word frequency queries, word trees, word clouds, concept maps, hierarchy charts, and graphs. The analysis, refining, and combining of categories with NVivo resulted in one overarching theme that related to an awareness that each teacher had of self and other. Four related sub-themes also emerged as they were seen as prominent features of the

teachers’ personalities. By this stage, codes were narrowed to approximately 50 codes in total (Table 4.1) as the findings began to take shape.

The use of NVivo supported confidence in the analysis and development of themes that could be compared back to the research questions. The extra time and effort was deemed essential, as the findings took their final form. Table 4.1 shows a refined list of codes that relate to the presenting themes. They are presented in the order of those with the most codes to those with the least codes. The first theme is off-set, however, as it became apparent through the process of refining and relating themes that this one theme described an intuitive (metacognitive) nature present among the teachers. Metacognition, as an awareness or analysis of one’s own learning or thinking processes, remained a strong overarching theme with the remaining four categories (sub-themes) representing key knowledge, skills, and attitudes as features of the teachers’ personalities. Each theme and sub-theme represented in Table 4.1 relates to passages, nuances of practice, ideas, and experiences expressed by the participants.

**Table 4.1**

*Describing the Four Participants: Themes and Example Codes*

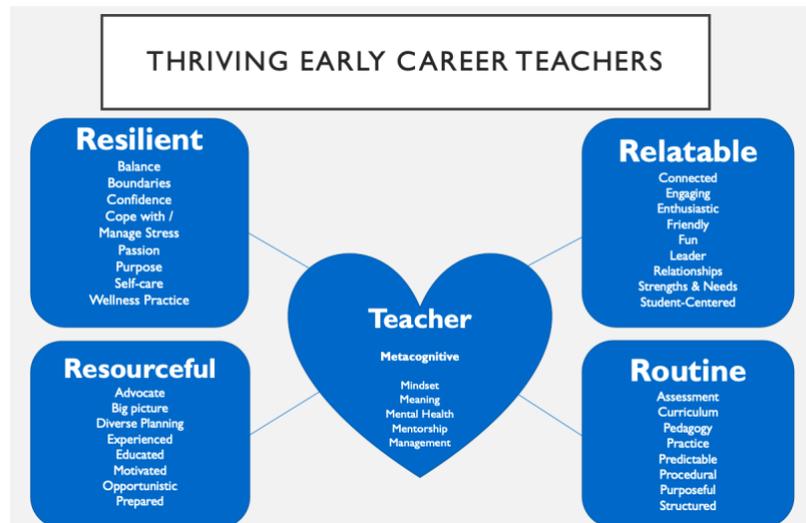
<b>Overarching Theme:</b> Metacognitive	<b>Sub-Theme 1:</b> Resilient	<b>Sub-Theme 2:</b> Relatable	<b>Sub-Theme 3:</b> Resourceful	<b>Sub-Theme 4:</b> Routine
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• attention</li> <li>• attuned</li> <li>• reflective</li> <li>• thoughtful</li> <li>• awareness</li> <li>• knowledgeable</li> <li>• mindful</li> <li>• growth oriented</li> <li>• optimistic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• balance</li> <li>• boundaries</li> <li>• confidence</li> <li>• care</li> <li>• make-do attitude</li> <li>• face adversity</li> <li>• wellness practices</li> <li>• passion</li> <li>• purpose</li> <li>• meaning</li> <li>• manages stress</li> <li>• self-care for mental health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• relationship focused</li> <li>• engaging</li> <li>• friendly</li> <li>• liked</li> <li>• mentors</li> <li>• mentees</li> <li>• needs-based</li> <li>• student-centered</li> <li>• leadership skills</li> <li>• enthusiastic</li> <li>• fun</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• experienced</li> <li>• educated</li> <li>• varied skill set</li> <li>• motivated</li> <li>• prepared</li> <li>• think big-picture</li> <li>• advocate</li> <li>• opportunistic</li> <li>• procedural</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pedagogy</li> <li>• practice</li> <li>• structure</li> <li>• predictable</li> <li>• management skills</li> <li>• outcomes focused</li> <li>• assessment</li> <li>• purposeful</li> </ul>

<b>Overarching Theme:</b> Metacognitive	<b>Sub-Theme 1:</b> Resilient	<b>Sub-Theme 2:</b> Relatable	<b>Sub-Theme 3:</b> Resourceful	<b>Sub-Theme 4:</b> Routine
<b>Distilled Themes</b> Common Threads <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>mindset</b></li> <li>• <b>meaning</b></li> <li>• <b>mental health</b></li> <li>• <b>mentorship</b></li> <li>• <b>management</b></li> </ul>				→

Braun & Clarke (2006) highlight that “a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research questions, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set”. (p. 82) When compared back to the research questions, the themes and codes describe the ECTs’ knowledge, skills, and attitudes as they relate to teaching competencies relevant to the profession (Appendix C & Table 3.1). At this stage, it became clear that the Four Rs were defining features of *who* the teachers were as thriving twenty-first century practitioners: resilient, relatable, resourceful, and routine. The Four Rs also represented *what* each teacher did to thrive, and *how* each ECT managed with respect to adversity faced. The final visual depiction of the themes (Figure 4.1) was tied back to the original metaphor of the heart (Huberman, Miles, & Saldana, 2014; Figure 2.1). With the metacognitive qualities at the centre, it was observed that the Five Ms served as highly adaptive skill sets (domains) that were scattered throughout all themes and sub-themes (i.e common threads tying the features together): mindset, meaning, mental health, mentorship, and management. This overarching metacognitive theme brought the core of the four thriving ECTs to light and it was decided that the domains representing the hearts and the minds of the participants be placed at the centre with the four sub-themes placed around the teacher; this was done because they pertained to knowledge, skills, and attitudes that served as protective factors against the adversity faced by many in the profession.

**Figure 4.1**

*Final Thematic Map*



**Phase 6: Producing a Report**

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the sixth phase serves as a final analysis in the form of a report, where carefully selected quotes provide a compelling account of the participants' stories and the findings therein. In the report, the passages selected offer verbatim accounts from the participants which connect both to the research questions and the themes that emerged as a result of the interviews and observations (Table 4.1). The report highlighted the relevance of the themes, which answer the research questions and describe the unwavering commitment of the four participants to their students, their profession, and themselves. As a final measure, drafts of Chapters Four and Five were sent to the participants. Those who responded (three out of the four) felt the depiction of them as thriving ECTs was informative, promising, and accurate.

**Results of Thematic Analysis**

The themes constructed through the phased approach to the data analysis produced a descriptive account of four thriving ECTs (Figure 4.1). At first, the analysis and findings from

early phases helped to characterize who the four teachers were (The Four Rs) through categories that represented features of each teacher's personality. In subsequent phases of the analysis, the heart of the ECTs was developed from the many codes attributing to metacognition and a thoughtful awareness of self and other. The Five Ms emerged from the overall picture, as being representative of domains common among the participants. Each domain represents the interactions and life experiences that promoted, developed, and refined these particular knowledges, skill sets, and attitudes in each of the teachers. The results presented next start with an introduction to each participant followed by the features (Four Rs) and domains (Five Ms) relevant to who these teachers were and how they managed as thriving practitioners.

#### **Four Thriving Early Career Teachers Emerge**

This section explores presenting themes by connecting the features and domains to the participants (Figure 4.1), revealing four ECTs who were resilient despite facing much adversity. First, short vignettes introduce the four participants by sharing their opinions, thoughts, and feelings about the profession. These early impressions reveal challenges, strengths, and optimism. Each vignette uses the participant's own words and presents the ECTs in alphabetical order, known by their pseudonyms: Beth, Camille, Laura, and Sara. Following this introduction, the remainder of the chapter weaves together the participants' voices with the revelations that led to the development of the Four Rs and Five Ms. This process includes the researcher's narrative, as it relates to the development of themes. Braun and Clark (2006) stated:

For each individual theme, you need to conduct and write a detailed analysis. As well as identifying the story that each theme tells, as it is important to consider how it fits into the broader overall story that you are telling about your data, in relation to your research questions. (p. 22)

In some cases, entire passages from each participant were included to represent conversations about thriving as educators; in other cases, only a few words were needed to convey significance. As they open up about their passions, responsibilities, and reasons for participating in the study, each of the participants offers an awareness of their profession's inherent needs and demands.

*Beth*

I think, there's always a bit of survival going on in this context. We have a lot of high-risk kids coming through, a lot of kids that bring a lot of stressful situations with them. It's tough, there's so many of them and some big disruptive behaviours and some big needs . . . I've had so many new things I've been doing, it's kind of just trying to keep up and trying to keep on top of everything.

*Camille*

I think teaching is being able to see the big picture. It's more important to have someone that they [the students] trust, and who's empathetic and who can try as best as they can to understand them. The big picture is more important than getting through all of the outcomes; which, I don't. I'm probably not supposed to say that, but it's true. I think it's helpful to be able to take that step back and be like, 'you're not going to get through them all anyway, so you might as well have good relationships and teach what it feels like to have good relationship and support each student.' Sometimes, I get caught up in this notion that 'we've got to get things done!' But I think, overall, just being able to see that big picture is helpful.

*Laura*

I value the relationship piece with the students, I am a relationship person. But I think, as for personality, I am a pretty warm, understanding, and empathetic person. I think that part helps. I am always wanting to improve and wanting to do my best. I think I just want to grow and want to make a difference and I am always trying to figure out how to do that. I really like the intervention pieces and problem-solving with the kids as well, because you can have a positive impact. It's also nice that I have an Ed. Psych. background, I know what kind of interventions work for the kids . . . even if they don't have a disability or are diagnosed, I kind of have an idea of where they're lagging.

*Sara*

I ask for help and I don't feel that I have to recreate the wheel, or make every single day over the top amazing. I have high expectations, for myself and for what I want the kids to be doing, but that doesn't mean that I am going to stay after school for two hours and make something up that didn't exist before. I would say I have the tolerance to do that occasionally, for special things, but I'm not afraid to ask for help from other teachers and I think that that's really important. I also take time for me.

After introducing themselves and sharing their perspectives on the profession, each of the ECTs identified concerns facing educators today: i.e. mental health, increasing behavioural concerns in schools, absenteeism, assessment, and the pressure to cover vast amounts of content.

*Beth*

We're focusing on how are we going to meet the needs of all of our kids, how are we going to make it calm, how we are managing trauma, or how are we getting the reading scores up? And obviously challenging behaviours are a stress. You know there are

students that have behaviours that are becoming increasingly disruptive and it's stressful to the kids and it's stressful to the teachers, but you have to make-do.

*Camille*

In my previous school, I had a grade seven student stand at the back of the class and call me, a word I would never say in front of my mom and he's back the next day with seemingly no repercussions; they [school administration] would not allow it [those behaviours], but they would also overlook it. In other cases, kids would be wandering the halls whenever they wanted, hiding in the bathrooms, I just never knew what the expectations were, I was overwhelmed not knowing the expectations.

*Laura*

Mental health and behaviours are through the roof. We had to work as EAs for probably two months because we had a nineteen to one EA ratio, and we didn't have enough of us to cover behaviours, needs, and breaks, it was a mess and it was disorganized. I was really behind on paperwork, so was my other colleague; my colleague was pregnant too, and some of the kids were kicking and screaming, so things were pretty violent. It can be a stressful job.

*Sara*

I stress [over the fact] that the kids won't be ready for the next grade. That's a big one. I don't want the kids to show up next year and the teacher to be like, oh, 'clearly you didn't do that or do this,' and it's hard. I think you kind of have to be easy on yourself because it is hard to get through absolutely everything. And there are just so many things that go on throughout the year, schedule wise. That's the biggest fear. And more specifically, well right now, I am thinking about math, because I am really gung-ho on finishing up, there's

just so much. I have a few units left that I really want to finish and do a good job of. Just making time to do all of that. Time, just time!

In addition to addressing the stress of meeting the students' needs, the teachers talked about the challenges synonymous with being early in their career, such as contract issues and job security. Three out of the four teachers in this study had recently secured permanent positions and one teacher was on a full time, but temporary contract. All four teachers spoke about the stress of finding permanent work and noted a sense of competition among colleagues, and even friends, as ECTs were vying for coveted full-time positions.

*Laura*

I think I'm a pretty calm person but I think a big stress is not having a permanent contract. I'm just taking replacements, temporary replacements, and I think that's actually the most emotionally draining part. So, I have all this training, but I don't even know if I'm going to have anything to do next year. You put all this work in and you don't even know if it will pay off.

This stress and pressure were described by both Laura and Beth as manifesting in a "hustle" culture, whereby, educators felt pressure to obtain permanent positions quickly; willing to do anything, before being faced with a career destined to substitute teaching or temporary work. Sara stated that the quest to find permanent employment "can be a big hurdle for new teachers to get through, just the fact that they do not give out contracts that often; and then you're stuck in these temporary situations . . . it's draining."

The stress the ECTs faced was impressively overshadowed by optimism and an orientation towards growth. Each talked about taking advantage of opportunities and facing adversity by achieving a level of competence they had admired in their role models, colleagues,

and mentors. The participants valued their position as educators and the impact they could have on others and they viewed participation in this research project as both a gift they could offer the profession and as time to reflect on or improve their skills. They believed in learning as a life-long process and had interests that supported them to become advocates for teachers and students versus succumbing to the stress of the profession.

*Beth*

I'm working on my Master's, I'm interested in this research, and I think it's important if studies come up and I can do one, it's important to participate. I also thought it might be a good way to make some connections too, because I do sort of want to do my PhD, but I don't know if I want to do it right away. My thesis right now is about the neuroscience related to learning and teaching; it's in education but the study theme is learning, teaching, and neuroscience, and it is really interesting.

Beth had also gone so far as developing a personal commitment to students through her Master's work. She called this commitment a *personal constitution* which reflected the notion of her optimism and growth-oriented mindset. Beth's constitution is written as she read it, verbatim.

*My Personal Constitution (Beth):*

1. All students share the same basic needs, how they achieve these needs may differ.
2. All students require care, some may require different care than others; If I am not able to provide this care it is my responsibility to shift my practice to provide the best care possible under the circumstances.
3. Every child is unique, I can respect student diversity without defining them by their difference.

4. There are expectations and constraints beyond my control. It is my duty to teach to students' strengths, develop their limitations and create an atmosphere of growth under these parameters.
5. Everyone has limits on their potential and my role is to help students reach their potential, not to determine what their potential is; there's always more work that could be done.
6. I have a responsibility to do my best with what resources I have; protecting my resources will benefit my students.
7. A diagnosis is a cluster of symptoms and behaviours not necessarily a mandate; a diagnosis will not dictate my teaching practice.
8. Politics and current events are linked to education in the classroom. Teachers have a responsibility to their students to be active and not neutral in the face of injustice.
9. I will have an impact on every student and I have an obligation to ensure it's a positive one.
10. Teachers have the power to change the world; if I plan to see each student for who they are, it will germinate . . . and create change.

Camille spoke about joining different learning groups and taking advantage of leadership opportunities to be able to enhance her skills. She looked to mentors and colleagues as role models, and she described herself as a lifelong learner.

### *Camille*

I think at some point I'd like to go back to school, I love being a student and learning and researching. I think I learned the most from my mom, my mom did a ton of at-risk programs; like kids at risk of not finishing high school, and I think from her just

understanding that kids are coming from all kinds of things that we can't even possibly imagine, and that you can't really just assume anything, helped me understand my role. She also stood up for what she thought was important and what was right and I learned that from her. Which is also something that I would say I learned from my supervisor [during my Master's].

Before entering the classroom and while early in her career, Laura took as many opportunities as possible to learn about her role. She looked to this research as an opportunity to reflect on and assess where she was at.

*Laura*

I just saw this research project as a time to reflect, and to assess: 'how am I doing?' And as a chance to improve too. Being early career, you're learning on your feet and you don't have a lot of that support system. I'm really happy I did my Master's before I started teaching because there was no way if I went into this blind with just my special ed. certificate, and doing that 390 exceptional learners class, I don't think I could do the work with who I work with. I wouldn't be prepared . . . I am always doing my own professional research or learning. I try to do my best, I try to do PD's when I can, this past summer I even took a neuro-pharmacology course, just to understand more about the medications my students were taking, and the impact it can have, and that was really cool!

Sara talked a lot about reaching out, taking advantage of leadership opportunities and professional development, and soaking up as much learning as she could in her first few years. She consistently reflected on a growth-mindset which she contributed to her happiness and her successes, despite the challenges in her first year of teaching.

*Sara*

I decided to participate in this project because I think asking for input and just not feeling like I am alone in the world helps; as does sharing with other people what is positive about the profession. I take advantage of a lot of things, for what's offered in the school. I do it all, and I think that's more than what some people are doing; to me if it's offered it's worth it to try. I really liked the new teacher PD that I went to, I liked all of them. I went to a couple of them and they were helpful. Not everybody goes to them, or can go, so I tried to go to that. Other than that, the in-school stuff and the stuff that's kind of brought to my attention here and there, that's what I've focused on for growth. Also, I would like to go back to school; say in five years, to maybe pursue a Master's degree. I think that would be really cool.

All four teachers displayed strength and optimism, and it was evident early on that each found a way to be an advocate for themselves and their students in addition to being vocal about the needs of their schools and communities. Classroom observations complemented the interviews by demonstrating engagement with the participants in the context of their students and the relationships therein. During the observations, the participants were positive, engaging, and each gave their students much verbal feedback through personal or group recognition, using both verbal and non-verbal cues: i.e. smiles, comments, reassurances, choices, or through authentic and genuine praise. The teachers were thoughtful and purposeful in how they approached their work, divided their time, attended to issues in the classroom, and assessed or reflected on the positive and negative aspects of their work. In the next sections the participants' voices help to summarize the essential elements of the Four Rs, as each is individually explored.

## **Four Features of a Thriving Career**

Though all the teachers approached their role in a dynamic and inspiring way, each were entirely unique from the others; therefore, until the thematic map (Figure 4.1) developed in its final form, it had been somewhat unclear as to how the emerging themes would converge from such different individuals. Strength was evident, as was a great deal of knowledge, a keen awareness to details, and all four teachers had relatable personalities, pedagogies, and practices; however, there were no similarities or ways in which the teachers prepared, taught, managed, or assessed in their diverse contexts. It was through categorizing and naming the codes that a clear picture of the four educators, beyond *what* they did, developed into a clear picture of *who* they were and *how* they practiced as thriving and competent educators.

### ***Feature 1: Resilient***

It quickly became evident that each of the four teachers experienced adverse personal circumstances, and yet they had strengths and methods that protected them from succumbing to stress. The concept of resilience emerged early, after only one round of interviews and observations, and it remained strong throughout. However, two features of resilience were particularly relevant. First, each teacher employed methods to minimize or prevent the impact of stress on themselves and their students, and second, there were other methods the teachers utilized to reframe or cope with stress when they faced it. These teachers also taught resilience to their students through the various strategies and methods they had refined themselves. This section shares the stress and the adversity they faced on a daily and weekly basis, as well as reflections that represent the nuances of their resilience and how each teacher coped and managed.

*Beth*

There's a lot of stress: you need to be doing creative learning, you need to be doing inquiry-based learning, you need to do whatever number of things that were brand new that they are making everyone do; it's a lot on top of being a new teacher. I think to myself, ok, not only am I just learning my pedagogy, I have to also learn all of these new strategies that all of these seasoned teachers are integrating. It can be a lot that is being thrown at you all at once.

*Camille*

There's a lot going on, a lot of behaviour issues . . . . I have two [students] that are transitioning from behaviour programs, and one who should be in a behaviour program. He was asked to leave his last school and come over here . . . . But we have so many more who, their lives at home are just so stressful and different from mine . . . . Some days, I want to go home, well basically every week, I go home and call my parents and I say, thank-you. Because the students' lives here are just tough, I can't even imagine. And then some of them, they are new Canadians on top of it all and they speak absolutely no English; I'm not going to lie, it's overwhelming. Some days I go home and I think, shit, somebody was crying right after recess and I totally missed it. I meant to come back to it and see if everything was ok, and, I just never got to it . . . . I was pretty burnt out the first year I taught. I have balance now, but at the start I didn't. Even when I was just point three [less than half time], I was like; I don't know how I'm going to do this, to teach grade four! I worked a lot later and stressed myself out a lot more. So yeah, it took a few years to push through.

*Laura*

What I really liked [about this research opportunity] was just the chance to talk to someone about early career teaching, because it does get pretty stressful at times, though I do think my situation is unique. I've taught lots in the inner-city schools and I'd like to think I've seen quite a bit. I know particularly in resource it gets kind of lonely, very easily, so I know I saw this as an opportunity to talk to someone else, and just reflect on my own teaching. I know with the kids that I work with, it's so easy to make mistakes, well in teaching regardless it's easy to make mistakes. I know I have to be very calm and aware all of the time and if I'm not then it can go south very quickly. Sometimes I just wanted to scream...because it's so hard to do, and so, I just try to do my best. And I guess what happens from there, I'll think, I've been through worse, so to me, this incident or that, it can't upset me, it's just a normal day. I do lots of self-talk: 'it's nothing, I'm not too worried about it,' or I just always think, it could be worse . . . Yeah, it could be worse! So, I guess that's what I always say or tell myself when it's hard.

*Sara*

I think a big issue is that kids are becoming more and more diverse and we have newcomers and we're being more open about everything. We're learning more about mental illnesses and just various challenges that the kids face at home and at school and in their day to day life and we're losing people [staff] who can support them in that area which is a problem. I have lots of students in my class, two in particular who experience anxiety and sometimes I feel like though I'm trying to do the best that I can, it's also hard when there's a classroom and there's 28 kids, and it's a little bit limiting. That's a struggle that we face, just the numbers . . . I don't know what the public image is with

education and that kind of concerns me and that's something we talk about as a staff, where sometimes it's communicated that our schools are good . . . yet we're losing important things . . . and it's really not ok for us to be losing all these things. I just wonder what the public perception of education is . . . it makes me kind of wonder, I think it's that maybe that people don't have access to the information that tells them the realities that teachers actually face in schools.

At one point, there was a particularly stressful moment with Laura where she had been especially upset and emotional. She was on the verge of tears; however, moments later, a group of students filed into the classroom and she immediately switched in her demeanor and presentation. She needed to be strong and focused in order to be her best self for the students and it appeared to be a snap decision to put her emotions aside. The students had no idea of the previous few emotional moments and she proceeded with an engaging hour-long lesson. Moments before the students arrived to her class, Laura talked herself through what she had to do.

*Laura*

I'm just going to do the best that I can today . . . I'm just going to give it my all. That's all I can do . . . If you had asked me how it was going yesterday you would have seen more tears and more crying. I was so frustrated, and I was having a lot of panic attacks, and it was probably the worst it's ever been. It was tough, and it was just a really sad day.

At the end of the morning's observation, there was not a chance to debrief with Laura and it left me wondering how she managed to put her own emotions aside and jump straight into teaching as she did so seamlessly. This interaction perplexed me for some time; however, I combed through Laura's transcripts and found the answer: "the most important thing I teach is how to

learn when things are tough, or doing your best when things are tough in life. Whether that's teaching them through reading, or modelling with the things we do."

I also recalled how each of the other participants had expressed visceral and emotional reactions to various life or classroom events (some had tears, or a change in tone, or a strong emotion), yet they remained focused on managing one thing at a time and just doing what they could. This resilience became a defining feature of their personalities and practice. They saw the big picture (as Sara had noted around the current social and political landscape of teaching), however, each either set boundaries, compartmentalized, or reframed difficult situations, by addressing what needed their attention and what did not.

*Beth*

There's a lot of stuff that happens in school, and if I sat and thought about it all, I could be a lot more disturbed by it. You just have to be like, 'ok, this thing's happening that's really unpleasant, but what can you do about it? You can't do anything, except what you can do in your classroom.' I could be sitting around and worrying and thinking, and sometimes I do, I think about what the odds are for some of our students, and when is the next suicide going to be, which isn't very pleasant to think about. Or I think about a kid who was doing really great and then I saw them get into drugs and then that's it they're gone. And you know it sucks but, it just happens too often for you to really dwell on it. I think you can accept it and then be like, this is what I can control so [she makes a gesture to separate them] and this is everything else . . . . I think teachers who can manage that [separation] can do much better. There are teachers who don't and they just get burnt out and it sucks to watch. Teachers need to set boundaries and take care of themselves. You

can be a great teacher but kids can pick up if you're working yourself to the bone every day until eight or nine pm. That's an important part, setting limits.

*Camille*

I think I have learned that you have to basically just flip it on and flip it off [emotions].

You know, like in one moment you're just 'Ahh [yelling]! Stop, just STOP,' or in another moment you raise your voice or say something not so good, and then you're in the next moment and you have to be like, 'ok, everything's fine,' let's move on, both for me myself, and for them. They don't need someone to be mad at them all day if something happens, and I don't need to be mad all day. So definitely being able to flip it on and off.

Early career teaching was an undeniably overwhelming time for these teachers. What it came down to, however, was the teachers' capacity to face stress and manage through it, without sacrificing their needs or the needs of their students. In many cases, they also did not worry about things beyond their control. An important part of setting limits and boundaries was not working oneself to the point of being unable to manage and letting that impact the students.

At this point, there was a shift in my thinking. What was perceived early on as a contradiction, thriving amongst unexpectedly stressful and chaotic environments, was in fact an affirmation. These teachers were thriving despite facing adversity, and their resilience was a defining feature that was common among them all. This resilience required a great amount of optimism and the ability to reframe negativity in the context of what is positive. Optimism allowed the teachers to face fears or worries for what they were and not allow situations to become all consuming.

*Beth*

I think optimism is super important, I don't think pessimism gets you anywhere. I will give you an example: they're giving us this job and they're not giving us supports, I get that, but if I came in every day and I looked at my students and I thought about the stats and I came in every day and was like yep, only half these kids are going to graduate and this one is probably going to end up homeless, or whatever it may be, I'd just think of course you'd be burned out, that's super depressing, that's super disheartening. Whereas, if you come in and say: 'well I can't change everything, but I can come in with a positive attitude most days and do my best within my limits and bring some cool new experiences to these kids and maybe I'll change one thing for one student.' I think that's important. We've all had a teacher who has changed one thing right? . . . I think optimism isn't being unrealistic either, it's just having an attitude that you can be a change-maker and you can be positive. I think that if I didn't have that attitude, I would absolutely be burned out, if I didn't believe I could make a difference then what's the point, you know? And we can make a difference.

*Camille*

I like that every day is different. Certainly, no day is the same. I like to be surrounded by kids because they are pretty optimistic . . . most of the time . . . and, they surprise you; one day you can be like 'stop rolling on the floor!' and five minutes later they're having a discussion about a serious topic like racial discrimination or something else that's deep, I really like that about kids! That one day you can be asking them to act like a grade five and the next minute they're just blowing your mind with something. I like that part, I like that I get to learn every day.

*Sara*

I think I am pretty optimistic and if you don't like something you take it with a grain of salt and you say 'oh, there's a lot to learn from that.' In the classroom, I think about starting fresh every, not even every day, but every block. For example, we were chatty in the sharing circle, and the sharing circle is over now, so we will try it again with journals. I don't get hung up on 'kids are visiting' or that kind of thing. I try to be optimistic in that way, we just press the reset button.

Laura expressed that optimism was one of the qualities she possessed that protected her from being overwhelmed. There had been a recent traumatic incident in her school involving a couple of students and though we debriefed the incident off the record, she contributed the following note about optimism during our interview.

*Laura*

If I wasn't optimistic, I feel like, well for example having that boy with the *incident*, if I wasn't optimistic, I'd be like oh my goodness, this is way too much! I think too like, 'who else is going to help the kids . . . who else is going to do it?' I want the best for them. So, I would say optimism is a big one!

Each participant, without exception, expressed having or utilizing qualities reflective of the literature around resilience (Southwick & Charney, 2018), and they used those qualities to their advantage, expressing the importance of frame of mind as an aspect of maintaining health and resilience as ECTs. During this time my understanding of competence and thriving in the profession of teaching underwent a shift. At first I had believed that competent and thriving teachers might face less stress and adversity, as they had potentially mastered the art of mitigating stress by fostering safe, well-managed learning environments. My understanding then

changed: competent teachers (a) did not always have safe, well-managed learning environments, they had stress and faced a great deal of adversity, and (b) these teachers were surviving as much as they were thriving *because they were resilient*. They used their mistakes and daily experiences to continue to learn and build strengths.

### ***Feature 2: Relatable***

I debated the word chosen to define this feature a great deal. Ultimately, I chose the word *relatable* over the word relationship, which I was also considering, because of its versatility. Though the two concepts are closely aligned, I felt that *relatable*, as a personality feature, encompassed more than just the impact of relationships. Both were strong themes throughout this work, and therefore, relationships are explored as a subsection within this theme. Relationships differ in that they remain an external factor within one's environment, whereas *relatable* described an innate aspect of the teachers' personalities.

The following codes contributed to the development of this feature: connected, engaging, enthusiastic, friendly, and fun (Figure 4.1). In addition, the ECTs were strong leaders in their classrooms and school. They focused on students' strengths and needs, and each was student-centered in their philosophies for teaching and learning. As vocal advocates for social justice issues in their classrooms, within their schools, and in a broader sense within their communities, each valued the importance of connection, citizenship, and camaraderie among people. These features made them *relatable* and contributed to an innate ability to build quality relationships with others.

### ***Beth***

I find the level of stress in this building is so high. My personal stress is ok, but a big part of my role is supporting other adults and collegiality. The levels of stress are not good. I

have talked to my admin about this and tried to get some wellness initiatives going and stuff like that, you know, we've had lots of things like stress leaves, and there are stressful things going on all the time. We become the ones who need to listen to our colleagues, and we need to listen to our kids too. I think that's been huge for me, like conflict resolution. Being like, 'oh, it sounds like you're feeling like this' . . . rather than being like, 'oh my god,' you know? My counselling class was actually a huge help with this, I loved it, and I know we're not counsellors, but it was a great way to strengthen everything in my life, like learning how to be a better listener.

*Camille*

I think what's really important to me is a student first, social justice oriented, everyone has a voice, kind of space. That's how I would like my classroom to feel and look and operate. I think what's important is how to be a citizen who cares about other people and who can take care of themselves, I think it's the skills to be able to do that. How to see from another person's perspective, have empathy, understand that people are different from us and that's cool, that's fine. I think the world we live in, especially here in Canada, is so diverse, and the only way for it to be peaceful is for students to understand each other's differences and have skills to take care of our own and each other's wellness; because it's a way more stressful world than when we were kids, maybe our parents would disagree, but it makes me think that as adults they are going to be way more stressed out than we are. And just taking care of themselves and taking care of each other is going to be super important. And if they have those types of skills and they know how to take care of themselves, and if they get to a situation that's tricky, whether it's

learning or something else, then hopefully they have someone they can ask for help or they know where to find help, or they can be the person helping someone else.

*Laura*

I'd say overall connecting and resilience would be the most important things I teach.

When it comes to relating to or needing help from colleagues, I always try to frame questions like they're the expert: 'well you've been working for so long, what do you think about this' . . . and I find they like that approach. I respect their experience and I'm open to their help.

*Sara*

I like social studies teaching in the younger grades because a lot of it has to do with friendship and relationships. I had a social studies prof in university, she just really emphasized how important that was in global citizenship, which is something we have really been focusing on. Citizenship is important. For example, you're you, but you're also a greater part of society, how does that, and how does school prepare you to be a nice person, a kind person who is responsible and respectful. Those key words and how your co-operative and stuff, I think that's really important in education.

Being relatable meant that each teacher easily built relationships and these connections were an inherent part of the teacher's strengths. Therefore, relationships are explored here as a sub-theme to *relatable*, as specific relations with others contributed to the participants' development of self. Though the four ECTs spoke of impactful relationships with friends, family, professors, and even students that were imperative to their survival on their worst days, and also to thriving on their best days, relationships with administrators and colleagues were foundational aspects of each ECT's development.

**Collegial Relationships.** These teachers felt heard, accepted, acknowledged, and supported by their school-based administrators and often spoke of camaraderie among colleagues in their school. For the most part, these relationships were good. However, in some cases they felt the profession could be painfully isolating, especially in the early years, if one did not find a peer group within the school. Each teacher spoke to the importance of reaching out to like-minded colleagues and joining groups or clubs, where they could explore interests and support students and staff alike. Again, relatable personalities contributed to being able to forge these lasting relationships, from which each found role models or even friends.

*Camille*

We have a middle-years literacy and math community, and so I joined our literacy community, mostly just to learn in a teaching area I wasn't super comfortable with. The expectation is that you bring back your knowledge and you talk to your middle-years group about it, which has happened a little bit. Coaching is another one, I like to do that stuff and I don't feel pressure to do it. The EAL teacher has also become a really great friend and mentor and I can be like, ahhh! I really don't know what to do and she's there. I'm not going to lie, I've even cried in her office.

*Sara*

I've made an effort to join different committees and stuff. I'm on our social committee and literacy committee and I've gone to different meetings where we have to report back to the school. I would say that people have an interest in what I have to say, even though I am a newer teacher and I feel quite comfortable sharing what I am doing, or sometimes just listening if that's all I want to do. I would also say working with other colleagues in the school is a huge factor in resilience for me. Everyone is very willing to share ideas

and collaborate with each other, so I work with the teacher next door, and her students, and we play math games with the grade one class and we do stuff with care partners, and I think that's really valuable too . . . I never feel like it's just me on my own. I have some friends who are new teachers and it can be a little bit isolating, I think. I have friends who are doing their first contracts or second contracts or prep providers, and it's really hard to go to another teacher when you're the only one teaching a social studies class, or you're only teaching one math class and they're at different grade levels and stuff. So I feel lucky that, I don't feel like I am on my own; I feel like if I am stressed out or concerned about something I will just go ask someone for help.

**Administrative Relationships.** The ECTs shared specific instances where relationships were at the root of their growth and learning, especially when it came to school leaders. Beth specifically spoke about the demands of the role and the culture of the school. Though she covered broad areas or topics in one discussion, she kept returning to the importance of the role of school administrators in supporting or fostering a school culture that is conducive to managing stress, and impacting the overall quality of life, and health.

*Beth*

We've got great admin. There's some crazy levels of stress going on and not ok ways people treat each other sometimes, so it's kind of a bummer, but there *are* great people here. I think almost everyone at this school is extremely stressed and that would be stressful if your admin isn't supportive, which mine is! I have had an admin in the past say things like, 'you need to *not* take a sick day' despite there being lots of crazy drama and stuff that has gone on at every school that I've been at. Some leadership is better,

some administrators are better at managing than others, like creating a really nice culture that we have here.

*Camille*

For the most part everyone is pretty happy to be here. For sure on a weekly basis you hear people say things like, 'oh I really don't want our admin to leave.' Or, 'I don't want our principal to leave.' I've heard lots of teachers say, 'I don't want to go to another school.' They're happy, I think, partly because our principal just trusts us to do our job, and make the right calls and he doesn't really force feed anything. I feel like in every school you can have people who just have some negative energy, but I think overall people are pretty happy here. I personally feel really supported by our admin, they're going to have your back. And if there is a serious behavioural problem, I don't hesitate to say, 'you need to go have a chat with someone else.' And I know that our principal or VP isn't going to come back and ask me to stop sending kids or say, 'you could have handled this.' I feel like that's super important. I've only ever been at two schools, but what I hear from other teachers, I'm not sure that's always going to be the case. I know my principal will always have my back. Looking to always get you what you want and trusts us to make the best decisions that we can.

*Laura*

Some days I don't even know what I'm doing half the time, I just take it day by day. And especially for resource, I don't have any other resource support here and I'm only here 50% of the time. The kids come from pretty tough situations, and I think sometimes it's really lonely. I'd say, thankfully this year I have really good administrators, so that's been helpful. When I do have issues or questions our administrators here are really good.

If we feel overwhelmed or we're not sure about things, we can usually ask them and usually they kind of agree with me; so I'm not completely off base or alone when I'm struggling.

Each of the ECTs spoke of a strong supportive administration team within the school; a team they felt they could count on any time support was needed. It was important that they felt trusted, supported, liked, and listened to by their administrative teams, and each was in a school at the time of this project where they had that. Laura worked between two schools in the past year with very different approaches to school leadership and she compared the two cultures to exemplify the importance of a strong administrative team, especially for ECTs.

*Laura*

I have really good administrators at this school, so that's been very helpful.

I'm the youngest teacher here, by six to seven years, so all the other teachers are very experienced and have a lot of calm practices, and I know they're also confident. Their confidence helps me quite a bit. They never cut me down or anything. Whenever there is a problem [staff or student] I'd say it's handled very calmly. In the other school, though, I'd say stress is very high. It is a really young building and a lot of young early career teachers. Even when I walk into the building, I feel like I can just feel the stress.

Laura noted that "the lack of a team contribute[d] to the stress" and she commented on many issues within the other school that consumed the administrative team's time. She said the "admin does the best that they can," however, the school was divided with many ECTs feeling left out: "I think a lot of the new teachers in that building are isolated and are pretty lonely too."

Sara's administrative team greatly contributed to her school culture and her early career success. She was grateful for the support because she had ECT friends who were not as fortunate as she was to work with such a strong team.

*Sara*

We have an awesome admin, for one, we are team teaching together, and I know that I like her. But they are both really awesome and they are really good about seeing things from our perspective in the classroom. They will handle things they think are out of scope of the teacher's responsibility. I've heard other people say 'this is something an admin should do' but they didn't do it, and I find that our admin is really supportive of the staff and they make time to do everything, and that's a hard thing, because it's a big staff here, but I always feel supported. I would say they also provide opportunities . . . we have a couple of new staff here and they show us PD's that we can go to and touch base and they're in our classroom a lot visiting. Our VP is in here quite a bit because we teach together and our principal comes in frequently, and we've had opportunities to go to other classrooms in the school. We were given a half day for professional learning and our professional learning was just to go sit down in another classroom. And I think as a new teacher, 'I have a half day to do that!' . . . And they encourage us to take those days. It's just an awesome admin here and I feel really lucky. I'm happy to come to work, work with the kids, and I don't get stressed out thinking 'I have to talk to the principal' or anything because she's very warm and welcoming. Our admin come in a few times to see what our teaching is like and just comment on it, they give really good feedback about what we are doing in the classroom.

These teachers faced stress and adversity every day, some more than others. However, they were able to access human resources as a means by which to cope and manage. In addition, they experienced quality leadership and friendships that contributed greatly to their lively personalities. They were fortunate to be in schools with the support of excellent administrative teams, which may have been the reason they came to the study in the first place. Regardless, relatability and relationships were strong features of the four participants, who felt confident in reaching out for support when necessary and, in turn offered it to others.

### ***Feature 3: Resourceful***

The third feature common among the participants was their ability to be resourceful. Although the participants taught in very different neighbourhoods, their communities and schools shared common dynamics, and high needs among students and families impacted the classroom at times. These school and community dynamics reflected the need for access to a variety of resources in the classroom, such as cultural supports; resources for new Canadians, including English as an Additional Language (EAL); and resources related to students who arrived at school with learning, nutrition, mental health, or other personal needs. Immediate access to resources that would help the ECTs meet these needs was not always readily available. However, the participant's ability to find, access, or create their own resources proved to be one of their common defining features. Their experience and education helped them to be motivated, opportunistic advocates who could handle the above mentioned diverse needs within the context of their classrooms.

### ***Beth***

A big part of managing is making my own differentiated resources for kids who are reading at a grade one level, versus the kids reading at a grade four level. Sometimes, I

think teachers – when we’re at a school like this [one with diverse needs] – our struggling learners are the students who need someone who cares about this, they need someone who is knowledgeable about learning needs and resources, and has the training and experience. As a new teacher, I am certain that I don’t know as much about differentiation as someone who has been teaching math for many, many years right? So I have to do what I can. I rely a lot on professional resources and books and take little bits and pieces. I love the Ruth Cullen framework for writing, I just went to her PD and I thought, where was this three years ago for me? I feel like there’s a lot of info out there that crafts an excellent curriculum, we just have to look. I use the internet a lot of times, I think I have a framework of ideas that I want and usually the internet can pull something cool up. I use *teachers pay teachers* sometimes too, but I prefer to reinvent the wheel and make something myself. Maybe I’ll base it on something someone else has, but I usually just want things to be my way and don’t mind putting in the little bit of extra time. I want them to be the right way for the students and every year that’s going to be a little bit different.

*Camille*

I don’t reinvent the wheel. I use to make everything myself, and it’s crazy, you can go online or to another teacher and say, this is what I am teaching and there’s thousands of good resources. Don’t reinvent the wheel when you can put your time and your energy into things like building relationships and finding what you need online, or somewhere else. I remember staying up until midnight, making my own reflection sheets and character analysis stuff, and now, why would I do that? It’s all online and someone has already done it and better than I can do it. There’s always someone who has something

that can help you. We have a SWIS [Settlement Workers In Schools] worker and she's awesome. She will call families to communicate what you need, if you want to check if can they do this or that? Or if you want to know things like, 'will they be fasting?' What's appropriate in this situation or that . . . And, for example, yesterday we went on a home visit together, she came, and I can ask her 'should I bring something?' She is helping with the cultural and language stuff, and even though our EAL teacher is fabulous, she's not from Iran, and she's not Muslim.

Laura talked a lot about supporting the behavioural needs of students and she invested in a curriculum support called *The Zones of Regulation* (Kuypers, 2011). This resource helped her coach her students through "reframing and patterning the brain" to be able to respond to negative moods or events either neutrally, i.e. "fake it til [*sic*] you make it:" or positively, i.e. "find ways to feel better." As noted previously, this reframing was something she used often for herself too, as she saw emotions and emotional regulation as a needed support for her students.

### *Laura*

We never know what the students are going through, so you do the best that you can to meet their needs each day. Some days every need is different and you never know what state they are in and you've just got to do your best to help them not to get discouraged. If you don't see the growth, it's because there's so much more going on than you know. The Zones is something I have found that is helpful . . . It's for me to know, if they're not in that green zone [ready to work] what we can do at least to pretend or try to get there . . . this helps train our brain to get there. I try to teach it as a resilience piece a little bit too. That's why I have the break cards, which ask: 'ok what do you need at least to pretend to be in the green zone?' I use the word pretend because it comes from the idea of, 'fake it

til you make it,' with students like Abby or Ben [pseudonyms] who struggle in the regular classroom, the reason why they struggle is because they don't know how to really be in a classroom. They just have an overwhelming amount of things going on. Teaching them how to regulate themselves and focus: [i.e.] 'what can we do to at least pretend, fake it till you make it,' so they can at least try. It's the same if you're really anxious and you have to do something really tough, you have to figure out a way to work through it, the anxiety, so that's why I have The Zones.

Sara spoke about mental health, academic, and language needs in her classroom and she had innovative ways of finding support from anyone willing to give it.

*Sara*

I have a student who, well a few students, who are being looked at for learning disabilities, and one with ADHD, and several EAL learners, one student who is new and only speaks Mandarin, so there's a little bit of a dynamic there. I don't have an EA, so I use a few pull outs, or tutors, or parent volunteers who I've solicited to come in and pull out students to help meet their needs. We find resources where we can.

In Camille's case she also had several new Canadians in her classroom who spoke next no English. On a few of the observation days she had no EA support and though she acknowledged that she felt like she was not supporting these students and they were potentially doing nothing, she was making do by utilizing peer tutoring and all available resource supports at her disposal. During observations it was evident that peers were trying to help peers, and even if it appeared like little was being accomplished, her students were included and supported. I asked Camille about how the students were able to work so well together with little guidance, and she shared that she had co-constructed group norms and expectations around working together and

supporting each-other through peer-support was a skill she had learned about in her pre-service training.

*Camille*

We co-constructed expectations together, I asked them ‘what happens when we have good group work and what happens when it’s not so good?’ . . . It was after we had some not so good group work. I feel like we learn about co-constructing a lot, I remember from teacher’s college. They’re going to respond better on their own and respect it more if they help to create it.

Each teacher spoke about the social and emotional impact various dynamics had in their classroom and how, at times, they manifested in behaviour issues, bullying, and conflict. Despite sometimes having minimal access to human and material resources, the participants were innovative individuals who creatively took advantage of supports, always with the bigger picture in mind, as they worked to do their job and support their students.

#### ***Feature 4: Routine***

The fourth and final feature that emerged from the analytic process was being *routine* (Table 4.1). There were no common routines among the four teachers specifically, but being routine and structured were essential elements of who they all were as individuals. During observations it was noted that each classroom group had a predictable manner in which they started and ended each day. Other routines involved check-in processes and calming strategies, in addition to general routines for answering questions, getting into groups, cleaning up, completing independent work, and more. Routines helped both the students and the teachers, and as an outside observer, the routines were comforting to me as well. It was evident during

classroom observations that routine supported students' comfort, behaviour, and well-being; additionally, more than one teacher noted that various routines helped to keep them feeling sane.

Routines were both observed and discussed. Beth commented on the nature of her colleagues' classrooms often, and how their routines supported a calm classroom: "I look up to the teachers who always seem to be able to keep it together, and be calm . . . they all have routines." However, Beth was also diligent about setting up the space and expectations for her students, in similar ways, for each class. Beth knew that routines were especially important during transitions between classes. Before leaving her classroom, she would ground students with a routine where she would express one thing she saw each of them do well that day. She would work her way through a line-up of students one by one and comment about their work ethic or attitude during her class. She would then walk the quiet group to where they needed to be. This routine was an excellent way to ready a group to transition from one space to another. On one occasion, I followed Beth as she walked a group quite a ways back to their classroom, and she only needed non-verbal cues to keep them in line and transitioning quietly. Anyone who is experienced with middle-year students would understand that this was quite an achievement, and I believe her connection, in a routine way, with the students directly before their transition helped with this.

In addition to Beth, the other participants also spoke a great deal about the importance of routines. Camille stated that it was "definitely worth the time to get them [the students] into a routine because then they're so independent." Camille learned the value of routine, structure, and consistency from her mentors: "I learned, when we co-taught a super small group of individualized reading, phonics, comprehension, and all the pillars basically . . . it was awesome, because I learned how she set up the structure and I think it helped to group them to help give

them what they really needed, routine.” Camille spoke to being “super consistent at the beginning” of the school year and she noted that when she would lose some of the consistency that her students would struggle with behaviour and she with management as well. Laura and Sara spoke extensively about routine.

*Laura*

These kids really need a routine. And for my own sanity, I need it too. I need time for me to prepare. I need time for me to check emails, print stuff off . . . time to get myself together. So that’s why I have the good fit book time; it gives time for me. I don’t have much prep, so it also gives them that time to get things settled. You saw how they came running in, they get really excited. They need that time to settle . . . If I had them sit down right after they came in, right away, and I was like, ‘alright guys let’s listen up’ . . . I’d be constantly trying to get them settled. So, if I have the routine and they are settled themselves . . . I can still have my ‘me’ time and they can have their time to settle in . . . Then the challenge is, to be ready, ‘ok now we are starting!’ And I stress [at this time], that we’re going to be in the learning zone, and I try to keep that routine specific too because, I know all kids need routine, but this specific group if it’s not routine, a lot of behaviour challenges can happen and if it’s not predictable, especially a kid like Andrew [pseudonym] who’s resting HR is 120bpm, if it’s not what he’s used to he asks [anxiously]: ‘what is this?’ So I have the routine so they know what to expect. If I have a routine the kids know what to do and that is [for] my sanity too. It’s a lot of planning . . . to get the actual groups started, it takes us like two weeks, but it really works.

*Sara*

In the classroom we have routines and procedures and that's something I've learned from other teachers, and it really works. There's already enough chaos when the routines and procedures are going on that if that wasn't in place, I think it would be crazy. I would say that I attribute my sanity to the routines and procedures that I've set up since the beginning of the year. And that is totally my partner teacher [mentor] and totally what we have been stressing this year, and looking at the research and how beneficial it is. And I think that has been really helping me stay sane. Sometimes, I feel like maybe we're not doing the most ground breaking stuff, but everything is really organized, and calm for the most part, and the kids feel really comfortable in the room. We have routines for if we are doing the projector, then they are at their spots; if we are doing a number talk, we are usually at the carpet, just to keep the expectation the same so they know if I'm explaining something new we will probably be at the carpet; if I am reading or we're journaling we will probably be at our spots, just to keep things moving.

### **Summary of Features**

These features, which I deemed the "Four Rs," described the thriving ECTs through personal and professional features of their character. Who these teachers were and how they set themselves and their students up for success, were important aspects of their ability to thrive amongst often times chaotic and stressful situations as beginning teachers. The Four Rs came as a response to many of the research questions surrounding *what* the teachers did and *who* they were as educators and people. These features were developed and refined by phase five of the analysis process, which specifically looked to the domains of competence as described in Appendices A, B, and C. As these features of personality took shape so did the culmination of

themes that contributed to the Five Ms (mindset, meaning, mental health, mentorship, and management) and together the features and domains helped to answer all remaining *how* questions pertaining to the teachers' knowledge, skills, and practices. The resulting Five Ms became the heart of how the teachers thrived in their profession and these are explored next.

### **The Heart of Four Thriving Early Career Teachers**

It became evident through the later phases of thematic analysis that the four features of being resilient, relatable, resourceful, and routine (Four Rs) could be used to describe all four of the ECT participants. The previous sections highlight that each of these four features spoke to what defined the teachers, and their ability to thrive, in what could often be a stressful profession. Clearly, these were educators with perspectives that supported them to persevere despite the adverse circumstances they faced, as each displayed personal, professional, and pedagogical strengths that allowed them to meet challenges and celebrate their successes. How the ECTs retained, developed, and refined the Four Rs became evident through codes that described the teachers as attuned, reflective, thoughtful, aware, and knowledgeable. The insight and introspection each showed could only be defined as *metacognition*; which in turn, contributed to the ECT's ability to be resilient, relatable, resourceful, and routine. Thus, the Four Rs are all features which grow from the ECTs' heart and serve to protect it. In the following section each of the features (Five Ms) are presented as a domain following examples of the metacognitive processes that led to their development.

#### **Metacognition**

This next section accounts for the experiences and interactions that led to the recognition of metacognition and how it contributed to the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the five domains of mindset, meaning, mental health, mentorship, and management. The

following excerpts from the interviews, along with observational data, display how the ECTs used metacognition in adaptive, problem-solving processes (Lin et al., 2005), an essential part of what allowed them to thrive so early in their careers.

Beth knew that mistakes were part of the process of teaching and learning. Removing the pressure for perfection was a tool that helped her to cope and manage with stress, and to her it was a key difference between those who might succumb to attrition and those who were thriving in their roles. Beth also reflected on how important it was to share that humility with her students: “I think it’s important to talk to the kids, and let them know when you mess up. I was working with a kid this week and I apologized, you know it happens. It happens a lot and we move past it.” At the end of our time together, Beth shared some parting thoughts that led to one of my first realizations about the importance of metacognition in thriving as an educator.

*Beth*

It was fun to talk about things and think about things after we’d meet [she and I], it was nice just thinking about what I believe and having someone to listen to it; someone other than my mom. Sometimes, I feel like I am really critical but at the end of the day the person I have the most critical thoughts towards is myself usually. I do a lot of reflecting, not in a bad way, not criticisms, but you know just always thinking and reflecting, there’s always something I could have done better, but then there’s always something I could have done worse too. And that’s the thing I started saying to myself, if I had a bad day, or a good day sometimes too, that ‘it’s just a bad day’ . . . and that’s the thing it’s not a bad career; sometimes you have a bad week and god forbid sometimes a bad month, but it’s a great career! Thank you for this opportunity.

After her lessons, Camille spent much time reflecting on things she should do differently or thinking about the students' lives outside of school and how that factored into important considerations she needed to make in the classroom. She said she would often go home and debrief the day with her partner, or her mom, and she would realize, in verbalizing and working through scenarios from school, that many of her students were at risk. She felt she owed it to them to be thoughtful and purposeful in her planning and flexible during lessons. If she missed something or made a mistake, she would replay ways to do things differently out loud, which displayed how she used metacognition to help her grow as an educator. This next vignette gives an example of one such moment, where Camille honoured her thought processes and gave herself the time and space to perform a reflective self-analysis. Camille, like the other teachers, commented on these types of reflections as *rambling*. They were, however, much more than that.

*Camille*

It's a good thing to keep in your brain: 1) that you're doing a good job; 2) I do like these kids; and 3) no one in this class ever does things to be mean or malicious. They just don't have the skills or the self-control because they're 10! They want to talk to their friends, and they need to move! Like today they needed to move . . . they can't sit for 90 minutes. That's a long time, almost a two-hour chunk of time. For most of them, when they come in every morning, they haven't really moved their body since last recess yesterday! They go home and they don't move, they sit. Of course, moving would help them to better learn, so, I definitely, woulda coulda shoulda [*sic*] done a body break because they were buzzing.

Laura often spoke reflectively, commenting on how she would perform research, take advantage of training or professional development, and reflect on the components of what she was learning and how it helped when directly applied to her classroom.

*Laura*

Though I'm just kind of making it up as I go along, I am doing my own readings and my own research. Asking myself, 'I wonder if I did this?' Or, 'what if I did that?' I am doing my own professional research, but also making it up as I go, and it helps with applying that training piece, it's like, I know now how to incorporate the Roadways [a reading program], my education, and my Master's training, and also put in the training the division is giving me, it's a nice mix of learning pieces that helps me, I meld them all together, I think, and I just figure things out.

Sara spent a lot of time reflecting on her educational experiences, which she felt helped to put her in the shoes of some of her students.

*Sara*

I was a really good kid in school and I think often times, I was forgotten about, I was just one of those kids who people said, 'she is going to be ok, we can leave her alone, I can focus on somebody else.'

As a result of her own experiences, Sara was highly attuned to the needs of her students as a result of her experiences. She paid attention to every student and knew a lot about each of their lives outside of school. Though there were 28 students in her classroom, she knew who read at home, who needed a snack to get their day started, who needed a few minutes to warm up, who was likely to be late and why, who was social, and who was not. Sara structured both daily and

weekly routines to allow for each of her student's needs to be met and so that each had an opportunity to shine individually, regardless of strengths or weaknesses.

Sara often referred to ideas about a dream school, one that was active, experiential, play-based, and allowed for every student to find something they could connect to and loved doing. She built a community in her classroom, but more important than that, she built a family, and she continually reflected on how each student could be welcomed, protected, challenged, and valued.

I prefer to have tables for these little guys. I think it's good just because we do lots of group work, art projects, and 'sciency' kind of stuff where I find it's nice for them to be sharing and practicing togetherness and social skills. It does make it a little bit more chatty in here, but I know I just prefer it to desks. I feel like it's a little bit more friendly, it's almost like we're a family in here eating dinner together, versus everybody being left on their own.

It should be acknowledged that metacognition presented as a prominent feature in these ECTs partly because they were asked to participate in thoughtful conversations where they reflected on, and in some cases analyzed, their practice during our time together. However, it was evident that thinking and analyzing were already common practices for the participants, as each of them discussed how they would mentally unpack their day in their heads, or with anyone who would listen, in an effort to sort through complex issues. These teachers were a model of reflective thought, for both their students and myself, as they worked to support the best learning environment they could. This openness and reflection, recognized as metacognition, served as the *heart* in Table Four and led to the development of further distilled themes that were organized into five domains. Each teacher possessed a growth-mindset, a sense of meaning and purpose, and a keen interest in and an understanding of mental health issues. Additionally, the

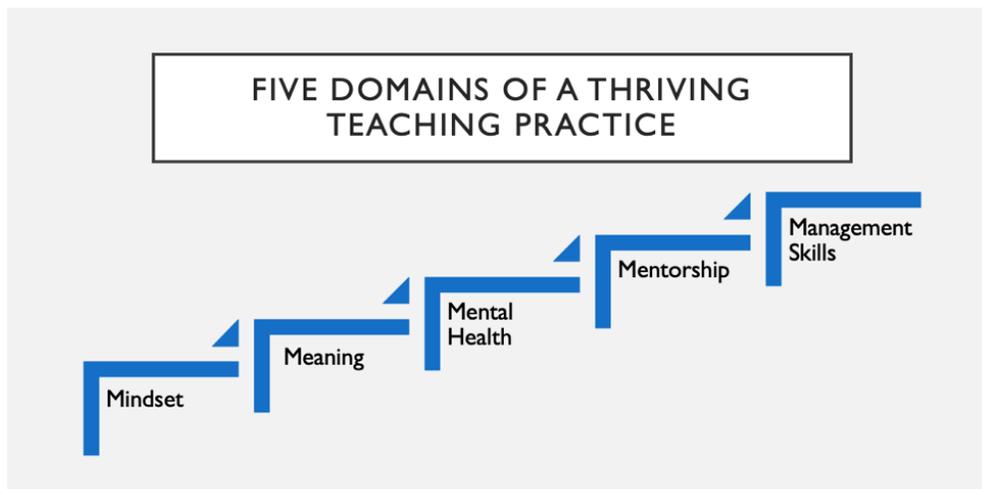
ECTs sought opportunities to support mentorship and management experiences that contributed to the development of a thoughtful and thriving practice.

### **Five Domains of a Thriving Practice**

In the following section, the five domains are defined and explained as they pertain to each of the thriving ECTs. I present them as steps, the development of which contributes to growing and refining knowledge, skills, and attitudes pertaining to the Four Rs and in support of a fulfilling lifelong career. In Chapter Five, the potential of these domains as areas for training in pre-service programs will be discussed.

**Figure 4.2**

*Five Domains of a Thriving Teaching Practice*



#### **Domain 1: Mindset**

Mindset has been defined as one's established set of attitudes or perspectives (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2020). With respect to the four teachers, mindset referred to a growth-oriented attitude and mindful or purposeful practices that focused on *problem-solving*, versus being *problem focused*. Each ECT developed this domain by facing and overcoming challenges, and it was most recognizable in their purposeful attention to the development of

problem-solving skills in themselves and their students. As seen in the participants' dialogues, mindset encompassed other related concepts: mindfulness, optimism, reflection, reframing, and resetting. Mindset was also shown by the ECTs in their consistent, methodical care and attention to detail, which supported their growth and that of their students.

Beth spoke about how fear used to hold her back and it was in facing the unknown that she changed her mindset and realized the value in being more open.

*Beth*

At the time of pre-internship my mindset, which sucks, was: 'I want to do my student teaching somewhere easy.' Well, I didn't get placed somewhere easy. I got placed in the inner-city at a school where Indigenous students were bussed in to do cultural programming, and when I found out I cried, I was so upset, I was closed-minded and thinking this is going to be awful because there's a lot of racism and stuff that I hadn't unpacked yet. But I followed through and a) my mentor teacher was amazing, he was very laid back and great with the kids and b) the kids were amazing. Because he was so good the kids were very calm and laid back. I learned a lot from him and it challenged me a lot. I'm very thankful for that opportunity and it really challenged my mindset about the education system and where I wanted to be and I think that attitude, as with most discriminatory attitudes, just comes from fear.

All of the educators had a practice that included growth through activities and actions. This growth orientation set the tone of their teaching, and was modelled to the students. As seen with Beth, the development of a growth-oriented mindset came from challenging her own fears and reframing her thoughts to be more open-minded.

Camille accomplished shifts in her mindset through constructive activities, which allowed for students to share thoughts and ideas that were reframed to be positive actions towards change and success.

### *Camille*

With larger scale problems [the students] get a little negative, so I ask the kids, ‘do you think that was really a good idea to do that? What could you have done differently?’ I don’t like to frame things in a negative mindset; if I can, I’ll say, ‘you know we’ve talked a lot about positive language.’ For example, when we made our classroom treaty, lots of kids would ask, ‘what are the rules?’ And I would say, ‘what are the rules that we should have?’ Some of the kids were like, ‘don’t talk’ or ‘don’t do this or that.’ I would challenge them by saying ‘you can say that but what are some of the other things you could say that would be more positive instead?’ I gave examples like, ‘we can listen to the speaker.’ Lots of the kids said things like, ‘don’t leave a mess in the classroom,’ so we would change it to, ‘we are going to keep the classroom clean.’ So, just like that, we’d reframe things in a positive sense, we changed the language. I think it’s just a little more purposeful. I don’t want to leave them with the bad ideas in their head.

Camille was always reflecting on her own practice in a growth-oriented manner and she modelled this for her students continually. Her mindset was forgiving of both mistakes and personal or student struggles and it contributed to her resilience.

Laura reflected on a challenging first day on the job where she used a difficult realization to fuel further learning.

*Laura*

Actually, the reason why I got into psychology and working in resource was because my very first experience was subbing at a school in the Kindergarten classroom. Within the first five minutes I had a little girl destroy the classroom. So, I left and I thought never again! There is a whole part of this world I thought, that I do not know. So, I would say now at this point, that was about five years ago, I've seen so much since then. If I was to see a student destroy my classroom in the first five minutes today, it's actually the least of my concerns. Even though at that time it was like, 'oh my god!'

Laura had experienced that, when facing adversity, she had two choices: she could either give up or find a way to face her challenges. She pushed her students every day to do the same, by reframing things from what was wrong to what could be done about it. This slight shift in mindset was a mark of her success, and she was teaching it to her students, as well.

I'd ask them, 'are we being disrespectful to each other and my equipment? What else can we do instead of hitting it?' I asked the kids, 'tell me more, can you ignore him, or move spots,' and then within two seconds one of them came and told me ignoring didn't work, and I said, 'what can we do about it' and he said, 'can we move him or me?' And so, I moved them.

Sara used a curriculum called MindUp (Hawn Foundation, 2011), which she described as a daily practice that supported the development of mindfulness and helped to model the type of mindset that promotes a successful start and finish to each day. Sara wanted her students to be like her, in that she faced every challenge as an opportunity, and it took practice to be able to do that. She felt that by utilizing set programs and lessons to help her teach, first about the brain and the power each person has to change it, she would exemplify the types of skills and character

development her students needed. Sara's students thrived on this mindful practice. These practices promoted calm and allowed the students to set intentions, consider goals, and train their brains to be resilient to the challenges in day to day life.

*Sara*

As part of the MindUp curriculum, we learned all the parts of the brain. We haven't reviewed it for a while, so I'm not sure what the kids remember, but we did spend a lot of time on it. And then we do our mindful minute and we do lots of mindful listening, and mindful read a-louds, and that kind of thing. We do it three times a day, so morning, which you would have seen, and then after music and phys ed. Because they come in straight from lunch and then go to music and phys ed., it's after that, that we do the mindful minute. Then again at the very end of the day. We do it at dismissal just to comfort and calm them down, so they are not running in the halls out to parents going all bananas. After mindful minute, I always go over what the next part of the day is going to look like so they know what we are going to be doing; so things are a bit more predictable. And in general, our classroom is quite predictable, the activities just change, but usually we start with a 'Minds On' activity or a game or something and then we do a number talk together, and then the kids go off and do something and then come back. One day, we missed mindful minute and everyone noticed, so that was the only day we missed mindful minute since we started it months ago.

None of the other teachers used a curriculum for setting intentions or for focusing on a growth-mindset; however, each used other reflective strategies to help their students focus on growth. Laura, for example, utilized the Zones of Regulation (Kuypers, 2011) to help her students verbalize how they were doing. If her students were not of the mindset to start their work, she

helped them reflect on ways they could change their minds. She would have them *pretend* that they were in the mood and ready to start work and she would ask her students what that looked and felt like. She would then ask them how she, or even they, could help themselves get there. Laura felt strongly that this reflective process helped her students to reframe their minds and moods. She believed that in many cases, simple supports like The Zones could be implemented to help her students be ready for the day. It became clear that by verbalizing and reflecting on challenges, each teacher confronted difficulties that they or their students faced. Attention to mindset helped to set the tone for perseverance and accomplishment, leaving less room for problems and more room for problem-solving.

### **Domain 2: Meaning**

To have meaning is to be guided by a purpose, where work and play have significance. Each of the teachers felt that teaching was a calling, something they were drawn to by a sense of making a difference in the world, teaching skills, and supporting strengths in others. The concept of meaning expressed itself in different ways for each teacher, as it was tied to values that came from personal experiences and connections with meaningful people and practices in their own lives. Beth was innovative. She wanted to start a program for the struggling youth in her community and this meaningful dream was cultivated by her earlier shift in mindset during her internship experience.

#### *Beth*

I want to start something, and even if I'm still teaching, I want to move forward in my career evolving my practice. I don't necessarily want to climb the ladder, I want to start something purposeful. When I see the way the theatre has impacted our kids, when I've done music, and other exciting things with our kids, like the dance and clubs and

different things; when I see these kids with this potential and these outlets that can reach kids in a different way, I think that it's something that removes that barrier and gives some kids an opportunity to apply a skill and learn something and kind of mix kids up and get them out of the same place that they've been and bring an opportunity and plant a seed.

For Camille, her mother played a huge role in how she found meaning in her practice and in her life, especially when things were challenging. This support contributed to the development of an *I can do anything that I set my mind to* attitude.

#### *Camille*

It's just doing what's right and standing up for what you know is important for kids. Being an advocate is meaningful work for me. I think for sure being an advocate and standing up for what's important, and that means advocating for yourself too. If you know what you want to go do, and you feel that you're well suited for it, you might as well try it.

Laura, had particular challenges in her life, and this meant teaching had a great purpose and meaning for her.

#### *Laura*

Purpose and meaning, that's a big one. You have to have a purpose, figure out what's the end goal. I really enjoy working on mental health, well, I am very passionate, I guess because I also have ADHD and dyslexia and I know that really influenced my own learning, and to me, well my worst nightmare would be to find out one of my students were living a life with no goals or plans. To me that is just so sad, or at worst taking their own lives . . . I have had that happen to people I went to school with and others who I've

taught in the past. I'd also say... who else is going to do it? I find it really meaningful to be there for them and teach them, well I think all of them deserve the best life that they can, especially when they have gone through so much trauma, how can we not help them to be their best selves?

For Sara, everything had meaning and purpose: body breaks were built into daily lessons and never viewed as an add on or a break from the lesson, and bathroom breaks were an opportunity to practice lining up, choosing a leader, socializing respectfully, and singing a song. In one small example, Sara shared how designing bathroom breaks into her day served a purpose.

*Sara*

I had a kid in the class, who isn't here anymore, but who absolutely needed a bathroom break every morning and we were having so many problems . . . This way I know where they are, we all get a little break when we go to the bathroom, we practice lining up, when we are walking, and then we'd always do a little song or sometimes a little body break too afterwards. We do it every day, and people are always like, 'what are you doing with your kids at 10:00 am every day?' and I say, 'we are all going to the bathroom.' It's a good little body break for everyone, it's a good change of scenery and no one knew the break was just for him.

In Sara's classroom, subjects were interconnected. Music was a part of math, and math was a part of music. Language, reading, and writing skills were built into every lesson, where student leaders and their peers would take turns pointing to new words and introducing new concepts in dynamic ways. Sara often said things like, "we're never just doing things to do things, everything has a purpose."

### **Domain 3: Mental Health**

The domain of mental health was broad, and it covered an understanding of the following: stress emotions, including anger, anxiety, and depression; suicide or mental health first aid and training; participation in self-care; an understanding of the impact of trauma; knowledge of how to foster resilience; an understanding of the role of self-regulation; and, lastly, some mental health knowledge or literacy. This concept flowed throughout the study from beginning to end. Eventually, it was defined as a core domain for thriving as a twenty-first century educator, as it permeated the lives of each of the teachers and their students. Beth spoke a lot about the mental health needs of teachers and students. Even at the pre-service level, she spoke about how much needs to be done to support the understanding of mental health. Beth felt that burnout could be mitigated with more supports, and that supports for educators would not only increase a teacher's knowledge base, but serve as a support for their health and well-being as well.

#### *Beth*

From the student perspective there are mental health needs everywhere. There are significant mental health needs here and there was significant anxiety even when I worked in a more affluent area. So, it doesn't matter what traumas kids are exposed to. I think that mental health is a serious issue everywhere you go. It just is something kind of rampant in our society right now, and I think it's something to be focused on cause sometimes people working here, will be like, oh it's so much easier you know, in this community or that community, but kids have needs wherever you go.

I came in at a time where they'd had huge budget cuts and I think that people are feeling the cuts and they're feeling that loss . . . there's just not enough support, mental health

support for students and teachers. We have counselling kind of covered but it's not even covered all the way, and it's like one clinic, the school division doesn't really encourage it, it's not like we get mental health days or things, there's not a lot going on at the division level. Like acknowledging that, 'you guys are working with some of the most challenging and vulnerable kids and you know, this is what you can do to prevent burnout' . . . . I definitely hear rumblings in the school, people who are stressed [and who] maybe don't have the healthiest coping mechanisms. It's worse at different times during the year, and I mean, this is a high stress school but it's at every school. I think they could be doing more education and PD around mental health. I don't think I've seen any teacher mental health PD's. I honestly just don't feel that I've ever worked for a division that values the mental health of their teachers, to be honest.

Beth also felt that the pre-service level should include classes on mental health.

I think that they should add in a class on mental health, I've never taken one, and I think it's huge. I've done PD around mental health, and that's super helpful, but I was also going to say that I think that a good class would be stress management for teachers. I think that with self-care and stuff like that, they should have a mental health class that focuses on mental health of your students and mental health of teachers and maybe that's a lofty goal but I think most teachers would say that mental health is the biggest concern that has grown and that for teachers, it only seems to be getting harder, and it seems like something you shouldn't have to teach, but it's obviously something that needs to be taught.

Camille was originally trained as a high school teacher, and she did not expect to see the level of mental health needs that were present in the elementary classroom where she was employed at

the time of the study. It bothered her, and she felt like she needed more support to fulfill the role of a teacher who often had to act as a counsellor. She was not comfortable with the expectations placed on her. However, she believed she was the first point of contact for her students and families when it came to mental health needs.

*Camille*

I never expected in elementary schools to see the level of counselling, mental health, support that's needed. You know, I think we as teachers, just don't have the skill set . . . we have a counsellor who is half time at our school who is basically chock-full. When parents want their kids to see a counsellor, we have to tell them, basically we can get them in to see them but, they might see her once every two weeks. Mental health is super interesting, in that as a teacher you can take the mental health first aid, but right now it's not offered as a PD or anything yet. I never expected it to be so huge. Like so many 9, 10, and 11-year old's who are seeking help. Some kids will just tell you. Like, I'm really stressed out at home, or mom and dad do this, mom and dad do that, or whatever. Some parents will come and request help. Usually, I just talk to them the best I can . . . and I'm the first person they come to, to see what's going on. But if it's anything that I deem serious, I will take it to my VP and say, I don't know what to do, I need someone else to know, I don't know what to do, and then we refer, to the counsellor or call parents and have the conversation. I feel a little bit like there's not that much I can do, like you sit for 15 minutes at recess and then the bell rings and you have to move on? Which isn't fair . . . I'm just always worried that I'm going to say the wrong thing, or I'm going to interpret that we sorted stuff out and that student is ok, and then if something were to happen at

home, it's very scary . . . you want to kind of take care of them all, you don't know how, and sometimes, I feel like I'm just so overwhelmed, they are not getting what they need. Laura expressed managing her own mental health challenges (anxiety, ADHD, panic attacks), and she had an intimate connection to the importance of teaching health related skills and developing healthy patterns at an early age. As part of her practice, she took it upon herself to make daily interactions reflective of emotional and social health.

*Laura*

I learned from my Master's, and my training and background in psychology that students who have intense behaviour or emotional challenges, if you think about attachment theory and you know where students are developmentally, yet you're still expected to teach them at their grade level or do the curriculum . . . How do you even get them there, developmentally? When they're just not ready. So, that's why I thought about The Zones and the check ins as kind of a nice way, that, even if I know they're not there, grade level or curriculum wise, I can at least engage them emotionally . . . at least they're regulating or pretending to, or they're going through the motions, and if we continue to go through the motions [emotional regulation] we can build that neuro-pathway. If you think of the neurons and receptors, we can build that and start to get that into a pattern at the least, helping them pretend to be there, we can start to get into a healthy routine.

Laura also focused a great deal on her own self-care, as she realized that she would not be able to do the work she did, in support of her students, without it.

I don't take any work home. On a break, I don't do anything, for self-care I do boxing and working out, spend time with friends, I love animals and have my pets who I spend time with. I think right now too, I don't have kids so it makes it really easy to spend time

on myself. When I go home, I just want us [my husband and I] to be at home and be together without work talk, that's nice, just having those boundaries in place. Boundaries is the biggest one.

Again, the MindUp curriculum served as a wellness or mental health practice for both Sara and her students.

*Sara*

One of my favourite things that I am doing [daily] is the MindUp curriculum. So, we practice some mindfulness, and I'm not a pro with it, but it is an awesome resource for any new teacher. First of all, it covers all, or most of your health outcomes for the year, so it's an awesome program and it's something that we do. Three times a day we do mindful minute and I just find that, if the kids aren't totally engaged with it every day, at least for a lot of the kids it's reducing anxiety and making them feel calm and even just to quiet them down after recess and quiet their thoughts, that it's been really helpful as a centering and grounding kind of practice. And then our morning routine stays the same every single day with a few adjustments and I think that's really important that the students know what to expect when they come into the classroom.

#### **Domain 4: Mentorship**

Collaboration and camaraderie were sizable aspects of the success of these ECTs. What was interesting about this domain was that mentors such as family, colleagues, and administrators were key supports. Being a mentor to others was also important. Either way, an important feature pointed out by each ECT was that mentoring relationships had to be authentic and natural. If the relationships did not develop organically, they were not as meaningful or

impactful. Beth talked about seeking mentors with whom she matched as being integral to her success at school.

*Beth*

I think that new teachers need support, but they need mentorship that develops organically. It is important to also have people in a school who have been in roles for a long time to help you. Someone like Sam (pseudonym) who is a mentor to me. It's tough as a new teacher but I was so fortunate when I came here. Resource teachers got a mentor, and I had the most amazing mentor. I don't know if you've met Sam she's been in the division a long time . . . and she would come two times a week and mentor me basically, and I know not everyone has that opportunity and it's a funding thing but, coming into resource, it was totally different. Being in a totally different province, with different acronyms and expectations, and programming and all this, and if I didn't have a mentor it would have been harder.

Beth also talked a lot about teachers she looked up to.

I think I look up to any teacher who comes into a situation and regardless of the situation, they know that they are going to challenge their students and bring cool learning opportunities to them and not just give up on them. I admire and look up to a lot of the teachers I work with, especially here. For different reasons, people who seem to know their stuff, people who seem to have their class really under control, structured, people who can build relationships really well.

Camille felt welcomed in her school by her staff and her administration team. She was introduced to many people and resources to help her through the first year: "I think if, I didn't feel as supported as I did at my school, that would have been really hard." She talked about

having people to share her challenges with, people to learn from, and those who just let her cry if she needed a place to be vulnerable. Her mentors trusted in her abilities and praised her efforts often, building up her self-worth in the process of learning her new role.

*Laura*

Laura had worked in few schools and had experiences where she had “really good administrators,” which she said was especially helpful when she felt lonely or isolated as an ECT. Laura felt that co-teaching was a great way to learn skills and practices from colleagues: “I’m thinking in schools where the kids need more support co-teaching is awesome if you can work well with a teacher.” In one of the schools Laura worked in she felt she lacked mentorship, however, she sought out the types of relationships with friends and other colleagues that could support her, on her own: “I have my best friend, she’s a school counsellor with the catholic system. She has actually been fantastic, and I actually have quite a few friends from education who have been good support systems too, usually I try to find teachers that we can just, laugh about certain things.”

For Sara, it was obvious that she had taken advantage of learning from others for quite some time. Out of all four participants, the mentorship experience she spoke of seemed to be the most powerful. She felt she grew the most as an educator by seeking out opportunities in classrooms where she could learn from role models.

*Sara*

Being in classrooms volunteering helped. Everyone is really, excited to get on the sub list but subbing is not teaching. It’s more valuable to see another teacher and how they do things. On my Fridays that I had off I would just go into another teacher’s classroom for a few hours and just observe what she was doing or test [complete reading tests etc.] with

the kids and it was just having the extra experiences that were really valuable. I've used things from every classroom that I've been in, and that's also a good opportunity. In internship if you didn't get what you wanted exactly, or you feel like you need more knowledge, going forward, I would say, just see if you can find somebody and go into their classroom, and observe for some extra amount of time. You'll learn a lot from being there. Also, I think they've set me up for a really good mentorship program this year, I don't know, we have a few new teachers in the building, and I'm not sure what their mentorship program looks like, it's not formal. For me my mentoring is mostly from my partner teacher next door. I really value her, her teaching is just awesome, I really, really appreciated her help with the start-up of my classroom, because I have done a lot of the things that she has done. Just how she manages her classroom and, well both of my mentors are very strict with the kids, I think the kids are even a little bit scared of them, which is not quite where I am at. I think one day it would be good to get there, because they have a lot of respect. I would say, for those teachers, I think that comes with practice. I look up to them and their teaching styles and the things that they do and they genuinely work and I try to use them. So yeah, we are paired up, she as my mentor teacher, and it's not super formal or anything, I just know that I could knock on her door if I ever needed something.

### **Domain 5: Management**

There were many statements around management. Therefore, this domain was defined in a variety of ways. Like mental health and mentorship, many experiences, both personally and professionally, contributed to skill development in the area of management. As an obvious feature in teaching, this domain covers effective classroom management routines; however, as a

broader term it covers people skills that each of the participants talked about, including effective communication skills, confidence in the face of conflict, and regulating oneself during difficult conversations, among other soft skills.

Beth had much to say about management. First, she noted that it was an area deserving of explicit instruction for educators.

*Beth*

I think that they don't have enough classroom management coursework. I think that the single biggest fear of new teachers I meet is classroom management. And I know for me, I took a classroom management class and it was phased out after I took it.

She then listed some of the many experiences where she had learned valuable teaching skills for teaching.

I think one of the single biggest helpers to my role of working with other adults and my role of working with other kids, was, I volunteered at the peer support centre, where we learned . . . not counselling strategies exactly, but active listening strategies; affirming emotions and feelings. I use that *so* much when working with kids. People skills! They need to teach them, because sometimes you miss something along the way, and then when you have them, you can teach them to your students. I've also spent a lot of time volunteering so that's where I've built a lot of skills. I've done so many different little volunteer positions and such over the years and I learned something from each of them . . . I had a lot of experiences and a lot of opportunities. I worked at McDonald's and was a crew trainer which was a huge influence on wanting to be a teacher because I realized I was good at teaching people things; it was a really good job. In university I taught piano, I coached gymnastics, which I never did growing up, I just did it for fun,

they needed pre-school coaches so that was good, that was where I learned a lot of games and stuff like that. My coolest job was at a science camp where they paired up pre-service teachers with engineering students and you would go out and teach science workshops. So that was a good way for me to get my foot in the door, and for a lot of schools that do a lot of planning and stuff, that was a really good job. I worked at a daycare, and right before I started teaching, I was a summer camp supervisor at a very inclusive camp for people with special needs; they have a lot going on, so that kind of was a big influence, and I learned a lot of things like having games in my back pocket, which has always been a really great thing when working with kids. I did a lot of diverse work with kids too, I was part of a program [program name omitted for confidentiality] where you take piano to inner city schools; I led Brownies for a little bit . . . So, I definitely worked with kids in a lot of different contexts. And I believed, and I would always say to people when they kind of aloofly decided to go into ed, you better work with kids.

Though Beth did not explicitly identify these experiences as contributing to management ability, she had obviously refined many skills from working in a variety of programs as a leader and with children. These were all great experiences she reminisced on fondly and her leadership skills were evident in the classroom. In some cases, Beth had also learned things the hard way. She had experienced conflict, a workplace bully, and the pressure of managing high needs students. At times, she felt she was being thrown into roles for which she was not fully prepared.

Nevertheless, by reflecting on them, she had some great advice to offer.

Teachers need to know their rights and they need to know to report things, [to] be mindful at any time [that] something could happen. You need to be always aware, especially if you're working with high risk youth, that something could happen. This is a

dangerous building [student violence], so that's basically a way of saying you just need to know these things.

Camille learned a great deal from the research she completed during her Master's degree, and from taking on both volunteer and paid positions that contributed to diverse management skills.

### *Camille*

I was in a school when I did my research so I worked with kids a lot, and when I was in under-grad I worked as a camp counsellor and did some volunteering, coaching, that kind of stuff. Also in high school I was a camp counsellor for a bit as well.

Many of Camille's management successes were found by persevering through a variety of circumstances, as well as, trial and error with classroom management programs, where she realized relationships came first over programs.

In comparison to some of my colleagues, I have a really hard time sticking with any behaviour type systems of management. We tried Class Dojo with a little emoji that gives students points, I just can't really stick with it because I don't like rewards . . . I don't know how to explain it, I just think, we should be better and be kind to each other because we should. In my mind, let's just do our jobs because it makes our class run smoother. I just can't commit to giving out points and then giving things away and then nothing, it's a little bit disingenuous. I don't want to just give you little trinkets because you got 50 points this week, it's just not how I am as a teacher. With behaviour, it took a while for me to learn, but you just immediately have to be good to go again, even though you're thinking 'oh my god you're driving me insane.' I have had to learn that many of my tough students thrive off of positive reinforcement. I could, and there are some days I

probably do, harp on them all day, but it does no good. It does no good for them and it does no good for me. So, I learned to definitely not go straight into reprimanding or getting a kid in trouble. Not treating it like he's doing it on purpose, because I don't think he is. Just asking him to leave, take a break, or having that conversation, 'if I am asking you to leave, I'm not mad, it's not a punishment, it just means you're not in a head space to do what you need to do.'

As the leader of her classroom, Camille found that she had to model what she expected from her students, which meant maintaining her cool and bouncing back after being frustrated with her students.

Laura also had several previous experiences that helped her to develop management skills.

*Laura*

My previous experience with kids were a lifeguard in high school, playground jobs with the city, I volunteered with PAAL program [a program for youth with disabilities], I did learning and social skill groups in the evenings with kids on the spectrum, and worked at LDA [Learning Disabilities Association] doing neurofeedback for a couple years, and my Ed. Psych work as a psychometrist on the side too . . . I would say these experiences influenced me a lot. I think it helps with more knowledge and information for me understanding how kids' brains work and how they learn and it definitely helped for engagement [in the classroom].

*Sara*

For Sara, professional development and previous experience helped to refine her management skills. She felt that discussing scenarios in her university classes was helpful.

However, seeing how other teachers managed and interacted with students was far more powerful. She took many opportunities to get into classrooms and watch her colleagues teach in addition to working in areas that supported valuable skill development.

Training is important and taking classes is important but having those real-life experiences is what made me comfortable in the classroom and it is where I draw ideas from and stuff. I would say for sure, just having those experiences, and having real lived experiences where you are seeing first-hand how the teacher interacts with students and not that every teacher feels they're an expert on that, but seeing it with the kids in the big picture is really helpful too. For example, in my education classes we talked about all these management scenarios, and what ifs' [*sic*] and big ideas, but when it came down to what I feel like helps my day to day life it's learning about the routines from other teachers and the procedures in the building that work.

Sara recognized the importance of liking her job and genuinely enjoying the time spent with the kids as well. These various experiences are what showed her how much she wanted to teach.

I worked in a kids summer camp too and other stuff, it's like at summer camp, it was planned to the hour because we had projects we wanted to get done and activities to do so yeah, being super planned is an excellent management skill. I really liked science, I taught at a kids' science camp and I really like teaching kids science, and doing experiments and stuff, so that kind of started me off and started to make me think, I would really like working with kids. I really like kids, and I've always liked kids, and I just thought, I just want to be with kids every day.

Job satisfaction was a key factor in management for all of the ECTs, as it helped to mitigate the stress of the role and was a conduit to facilitating fun and engaging projects that kept

students busy. The skills learned in their previous volunteer or work experiences with kids were an invaluable contribution to how these teachers developed a conceptual understanding of all that management entails.

### **Summary of the Findings**

Early impressions pointed to the confidence and competence of the four ECTs, who navigated their everyday classroom experiences successfully, even though their jobs were stressful and at times overwhelming. Later, a thematic analysis of conversations and interactions revealed a holistic picture of four thriving ECTs (Figure 4.1) who, at the core, were thriving based on domains of personal and professional development (Five Ms). Surrounding the teachers were four themes, noted here as features of character (Four Rs) that served as protective factors against the adversities they faced. The findings of this work provide the foundation for a discussion based on four individuals who inspire the profession of teaching. Chapter Five presents this discussion, along with supporting literature, to share implications and considerations for teacher education based on this work.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Conclusions**

This chapter elaborates on the findings of a research project that investigated the lives and experiences of four early career teachers (ECTs) in the province of Saskatchewan. The goal of the work was to understand the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that supported a thriving start to one's career. The research took place over several months, in the spring of 2019, and was followed by a rigorous thematic approach to data analysis. Interviews, observations, and personal reflections were analyzed through six phases, from which four themes first emerged. Each theme represented features common among the four ECTs; they were resilient, relatable, resourceful, and routine. Though each of the educators had different styles and personalities, reflected in their unique manner and approach to teaching, they were similar in terms of their experiences, which contributed to confidence and competence in their roles. The features resulted in the development of five domains: mindset, meaning, mental health, mentorship, and management, representing each as a thriving educator who was thoughtful, metacognitive and protected from, what at times, was stressful and demanding work.

### **Discussion**

The four ECTs who participated in this study were exemplary educators who gracefully and humbly navigated the joys of teaching, as well as the anxiety and stress presented by the profession. They were each young women: early in their career, well-educated, experienced, knowledgeable, committed to lifelong learning, optimistic, and oriented towards growth. These teachers faced problems and matched adversity with resilience and strength. No matter how hard some of their days were, they pulled through. Having seen much already in the early years of their career, they understood the importance of having an open mind, being flexible, maintaining

structure and routine, and developing relationships when managing the needs of their students, who, in many cases had faced much adversity themselves.

These four teachers taught in schools and classrooms that were as complex and diverse as any in the twenty-first century. Their students faced poverty, prevailing mental health concerns, trauma, language barriers, developmental difficulties, and a variety of other challenges, and they were fortunate to have such extraordinary teachers. What was learned from the experiences and actions of the four ECTs can be shared with others who may be struggling in the face of the profession's many challenges. These findings support a discussion and make considerations, for personal and professional development, as well as future research and potential coursework that explores the applicability of the findings, features and domains within teacher education.

#### **Four Features of a Thriving Career**

The common features among the four participants, which were found through a thematic analysis of the data, are reviewed first. These four common features, which first presented as themes, are called the Four Rs, and they help explain how the ECTs were able to thrive in their career amidst dynamic and complex classroom settings. The upcoming discussion links each of these features, first introduced in Chapter Four, with the literature.

#### ***Resilient***

The thematic analysis completed for this work presented many codes that reflected qualities of resilience (Figure 4.1). Southwick and Charney (2018) define resilience as “the ability to bounce back after experiencing difficulty” (p. 8), while others have defined resilience as the ability to face adversity, manage after a stressful or traumatic event, or to weather a storm and potentially come out stronger than one was before (Southwick & Charney, 2018). Resilience was a top theme that emerged early in the process when interviews and observations were still

being completed. From the first interview with each participant, their descriptions of the initial years on the job provided details of circumstances where they faced immense stress or pressure.

These stressful circumstances had the potential to promote burnout, as they reflected harsh realities and elicited much emotion from the participants. These situations included the following: disagreements or conflict with colleagues, including workplace bullying; management and behavioural difficulties, i.e. verbal and physical abuse from students; violent or traumatic events in the lives of some students, including suicide, suicide attempts or ideation, and abuse; fears about mistakes that might result in a student suffering emotionally or physically, i.e. not 'making the right call' in a potentially dangerous situation; and general concern for students with respect to bullying, mental health, and neglect or poverty among the students and their families. Each of the teachers clearly possessed a great deal of strength, as displayed in how they faced and managed these adverse conditions with care, empathy, understanding, and a desire to learn more about how they could do things in their classrooms that might mitigate the impact of stress.

Having personal boundaries helped within these complex classroom environments, and when it came to some of the heavier topics, each discussed self-care as a common practice in mitigating the emotional load. Self-care included having people to talk to. The reflective process offered through conversational-style interviews is where it became evident that each teacher used adaptive and metacognitive processes, refined through various experiences working in leadership roles. All four teachers noted that talking about their struggles and successes helped to compartmentalize emotions and manage stress. As a feature of resilience, talking about their successes and challenges was common for the four teachers, as each reflected on family, friends, colleagues, and even administrators with whom they confided.

In a five-year longitudinal study with ECTs in Alberta (Alberta Teacher’s Association, 2013), research summarized teacher attrition and retention, noting that at least three possible explanations played a part in teacher resilience: working conditions, characteristics of teachers, and demographics or policy conditions. In a section on teacher characteristics the document summarized that personal characteristics, such as resilience, “have a role in determining whether a teacher perseveres or leaves the profession” (p. 7). Having conducted several studies with new teachers over the last few years, the Alberta Teacher’s Association pointed to key characteristics of induction as being factors in early career attrition, noting three specific factors that perpetuated a harmful transition into the profession. Table 5.1 compares a summary of the Alberta study with three related factors from this work. The results of this study present four teachers who were direct opposites of the cases where ECTs in Alberta faced difficulty during the induction phase. The comparison below highlights mindset, boundaries, and acceptance of feedback as factors contributing to resilience in ECTs.

**Table 5.1**

*Factors of Harmful Induction Versus Factors of Resilient Induction to the Teaching Profession*

<b>Factors that Perpetuate Harmful Induction Alberta (ATA, 2014)</b>	ECTs want to be recognized as competent and legitimate professionals. As a result, they are afraid to ask for help.	ECTs lack tenure and, as a result, are afraid to ask for help and to say “no”.	ECTs (like their more-experienced peers) received little ongoing feedback and few evaluations.
<b>Factors Conducive to Resilient Induction Saskatchewan (Jaunzems-Fernuk, 2020)</b>	ECTs were willing to seek / ask for help, and did so often.	ECTs drew clear boundaries around what they were and were not willing to take on.	ECTs received on-going feedback and new teacher evaluations that supported growth.

The comparison of the two groups, though small and from different contexts in the Saskatchewan study, shows a difference between the teachers’ mindsets. The Alberta group was afraid to ask questions, appear as incompetent, or make mistakes, whereas the Saskatchewan

group was open to learning, making mistakes, setting limits, and receiving teacher evaluations that supported personal and professional growth. Throughout the process, the ECTs shared that they were able to frame challenges in such a way that growth and change were apparent. Talking through difficulties supported coping and managing and acted as a form of problem-solving; in addition, it prevented the participants from becoming stuck when faced with challenges. It was also apparent that seeking out opportunities for reflection and feedback was a normal pursuit for each of the four teachers, and this factored into their resilience.

### ***Relatable***

The Merriam-Webster dictionary (2020) describes *relatable* as being able to connect to others. Relatable people are known to have a variety of likable interpersonal skills or qualities, developed with an understanding that people are at the core of the work (Minott, 2020). The ECTs in this study easily connected with others and they exhibited personalities that were engaging, enthusiastic, and friendly; they pursued enjoyable activities, both in and out of school, and made a point of having fun with their students. These teachers were well liked and seen as leaders in their schools and communities. They had excellent relationships with mentors, who they respected and valued. Relationships were at the heart of their practice and each operated with a person-centred, strengths first perspective. These teachers worked hard to meet their students' needs, and though each had a unique personality, relatability was a core trait that contributed to all of their success.

In caregiving professions, where the well-being of others remains essential to the work, relatability and relationship are key (Minott, 2020). When it comes to relationship in the classroom, the American Psychological Association stated: “students who have close, positive and supportive relationships with their teachers will attain higher levels of achievement” in

school (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2020, para. 1). Relationships with others can motivate people to succeed in a variety of domains, including personal, social, emotional, academic, and health related (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Numerous studies cite relationship as being a primary factor in student happiness and success in school (Aud et al., 2012; Hargreaves, 2005; Hawk, Cowley, Hill, & Sutherland, 2002). In a meta-analysis of 99 separate studies (elementary through high school), it was found that both positive and negative relationships between teachers and students had a medium to large effect size on students' social functioning, behaviour, and academic engagement or learning (Roorda et al., 2011). Overall, the analysis concluded that "associations of teacher-student relationships with engagement and achievement were substantial" elements of student success (p. 520).

If teachers are to support their students socially, emotionally, and academically, relationships are key. Relatability, as a key feature of personality, influences one's ability to build relationships and rapport with those whom they spend a great deal of time. According to social learning theory, relationships can instill confidence, trust, and the motivation to learn or grow. Bandura (1999) affirmed that a key feature of relatability was social interaction and experiences that influence relational capacity support one's ability to grow:

Humans have an unparalleled capacity to become many things. The qualities that are cultivated and the life paths that realistically become open to them are partly determined by the nature of the societal systems to which their development is entrusted. Social systems that cultivate generalizable competencies, instill a robust sense of efficacy, create opportunity structures, provide aidful resources, and allow room for self-directedness increasing the chances that people will realize what they wish to become. (p. 65)

Learning remains a process shaped by interactions among people (Bandura, 1977), and teachers who have the capacity to build strong relationships with their students and colleagues have a greater chance of thriving in the social system that is their community, school, and classroom (Bandura, 1999). As was seen with the four participants in this study, it can be especially important to embrace the development of relational skills. Being relatable serves as both a protective factor against adversity and a support in the development of social, emotional, and academic skills.

### ***Resourceful***

Resourceful individuals are problem solvers who seek answers or experiences that can help them to develop solutions to personal or professional challenges (Ponton, & Rhea, 2006). Resourcefulness has been defined by the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2020), as being able to find the means or the ways by which to face difficult situations. There were many ways resourcefulness was demonstrated as a shared quality among each of the ECTs in this study. The codes that supported the development of this feature spoke to being a champion of student-centred, active, and creative learning environments. These teachers saw the big picture, which required a diverse planning process and the ability to provide opportunities that motivated, and engaged students.

Each of the four participants noted a love for learning and a disposition towards it being life-long. They had a keen interest in research, and each described themselves as being someone who faced challenges and solved problems by turning to various resources on their own or by looking to others (human resources) for help. This quality was fostered through personal and professional development, as well as by having gratitude for the many learning opportunities offered to, and taken advantage of, by each. When the teachers in this study were faced with

problems or needed to make decisions, they either found adequate resources to support them, or they made do with what they had. During our time together, none of the teachers ever left a difficult situation feeling defeated or stuck, as every new experience was approached with persistence and optimism. Insight was a key feature of the teachers' resourcefulness, as each navigated various classroom situations with conscious observation, awareness, metacognition, and adaptation. Whether it was a necessary change in tone; a move about the room to disrupt a behaviour problem via proximity; a quick change in direction, with respect to the learning; or a general response to students' need, while graciously adapting a lesson, these teachers prevailed.

In Saskatchewan, curricula renewal processes (2010) have resulted in K to 12 curricula that have been designed with the necessity of teacher autonomy, insight, and resourcefulness, requiring teachers to seek engaging and challenging supports to meet learning outcomes. Curricula no longer mandate specific resources, rather, they provide myriad options, covering broad areas of learning and cross-curricular competencies, from which teachers must pick and choose to design learning experiences. Therefore, teachers who are not resourceful, may struggle to craft the many options at hand into their own streamlined and individual process. The open-ended design of Saskatchewan outcomes leaves much up to the discretion and creativity of the teacher. Though the search for resources to support and guide learning can be onerous, the four ECTs in this study thrived in this environment. Each was committed to taking the time needed to source out, develop, or create engaging and thoughtful lessons, combining elements of music, drama, art, and other visual or hands-on activities and projects to enhance typical lessons.

The ECTs also looked to the Internet to further expand the resources at hand, knowing that many have come before them and have created lessons and activities they could easily use or adapt. In this case, most adapted any ready-made lessons given to them by predecessors or found

online, as they felt reinventing the wheel was not an effective use of time. Resources matched students' abilities and the teachers differentiated lessons to creatively approach the learning in ways that motivated and excited their students, meeting diverse needs. Some examples of resourcefulness included performing a play instead of rote reading practice; singing songs and using music and games to learn the nuances of language; adding drama, music, or fun videos to math classes; creating and telling stories; editing one another's work; and co-constructing expectations to build assignments or set norms together.

Dr. Bruce Perry (2020), an expert in trauma and self-regulation, stated that in order for people to nurture calm, regulate emotions, and mitigate stress in themselves and others, they must fill their "reward buckets" daily (Perry, 2020, 9:36). Resourcefulness is a key feature in one's ability to do this. Perry stated numerous healthy ways to regulate oneself, including healthy relationships and interactions with others, rhythmic engagement with something soothing or calming, and participation in activities that fall in line with one's values or beliefs. The participants in this study sought expertise and experience often through the pursuit of courses or activities (whether school-based or in their free time). These interests included activities that supported the arts; courses in biological, behavioural, and developmental models of learning (psychology); canoe certification, among other physical or recreational pursuits; interest-based research into innovative lesson planning and activities that would support diverse learners' needs; and the pursuit of hobbies and activities that fulfilled them, such as volunteer work. Resourcefulness is required to accomplish many of these tasks and the participants remained fulfilled through resources that included the pursuit of sports, dance, drama, volunteer work, yoga, and other activities.

The ECTs shared a common interest in leadership roles, both as a result of and contribution to their ability to be resourceful. This feature was passed on to the students, which helped to cultivate their leadership skills, abilities, and interests. Interest, ability, and passion, when combined with motivation and effort to enhance professional practice, has been seen to encourage retention and success in the profession of teaching (Stronge, 2018), and this was an undeniable feature of the ECTs' success, contributing to confidence and commitment in their work.

### ***Routine***

Structure, predictability and routine are well-established management practices that support learning and calm behaviour in a classroom, each serving as preventative measures that help students make the right choices (Stronge, 2018). In a meta-analysis utilizing empirical studies of evidence-based best practices for classroom management, Simonsen et al. (2008), concluded that routine and structure are two critical features of effective classroom management. It has also been explained that predictable routines and structured environments positively support the social, emotional, behavioural, and academic needs of students and that each works as an essential element in a thriving classroom environment (Cavanaugh, 2016).

Routine was integral to all aspects of professional practice for the ECTs in this study. There were weekly routines, opening and closing routines, and routines throughout lessons, which were taught and rehearsed. In addition, the teachers themselves were predictable in their behaviours, mannerisms, patterns, and demeanour. Even on the most chaotic days, where there were interruptions, distractions, and shifts to routine, the students could predict their teacher's responses and they managed well given the consistency. Each of the four ECTs classrooms had posters depicting co-constructed norms and daily routines, and it was obvious when observing

the teachers that they drew the students' attention to these practices in order to support smooth transitions, group work, and independent study.

There were also visuals, such as calendars and pictures, that depicted sequences for various activities and expectations, and students could visually connect to this material for reference whenever they needed to. One of the most impactful examples of routine was how each lesson and day started or ended, where students in each classroom could arrive late or early and know exactly what was expected of them or what was missed. In Sara's classroom, a couple of students often arrived late. By starting the day on a carpet, in a sharing circle each morning, she allowed those children to come in and start their day without disruption to the rest of the group. This practice supported their confidence, as well as their sense of belonging in the classroom.

### **The Five Ms: Domains of a Thriving Practice**

This study was guided by the theoretical framework of social constructivism; a theory that emphasizes humans as being "active, vigorous participants in their own existence" and construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1980, p. 123). Within this framework, learning and growth are experienced when an internal development process is awakened through interactions and co-operation with others to construct new knowledge from one's experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). Many interactions helped the themes from this work take shape and develop into workable ideas, supporting the discussion. There were interactions between the teachers and their environments, interactions with myself as the researcher, and later, interactions with the narratives and reflections through reviews of the transcripts, field notes, and journal.

An iterative process of constructing themes culminated in the final phases of this work, which allowed for the participants and researcher to review emerging ideas and make suggestions or changes. In the previous section, these initial themes were presented as features

common to all participants, and they are reflected as qualities among the participants that showed the importance of resilience, relatability, resourcefulness, and routine (Four Rs). At the centre of these features was the heart of the teacher participants, who exhibited adaptive processes split into five domains requiring the use of metacognitive processes (Lin et al., 2005). These processes helped define the teachers' success, as they were innately connected to a cognitive, reflective practice that supported themselves and their students. Metacognition was at the heart of the participants' growth and learning and it related inherently to an ability to self-regulate, problem-solve, and adapt to changing circumstances (Laskey & Hetzel, 2010; Lester, Garofalo, & Kroll, 1989; Lin et al., 2005). Metacognition is not an isolated theme in this discussion, rather it is presented as an overarching idea that houses five specific domains (Five Ms): mindset, meaning, mental health, mentorship, and management. The Five Ms are presented next with the defining features of each, as they pertained to this work.

1. **Mindset:** Possess a growth-oriented mindset, mindful, and thoughtful approach to work and life.
2. **Meaning:** Guided by a purpose; work and play have significance.
3. **Mental Health:** Possess an understanding of the stress emotions (anger, anxiety, depression); suicide or mental health first aid and training; participation in self-care; the impact of trauma; how to foster resilience; the role of self-regulation; and additional mental health knowledge or literacy.
4. **Mentorship:** Understand the importance of collaboration and camaraderie; reciprocally supportive relationships with peers, colleagues, and mentors.
5. **Management Skills:** Use of effective classroom management routines and communication skills, have confidence in the face of conflict, and utilize emotional regulation during tough conversations.

The order the Five Ms are presented in is purposeful, as is their step-by-step representation (Figure 4.2). Following the analysis, it occurred that each was a pre-requisite for the next, noting that a growth-oriented mindset was a priority in any role where one desired to flourish and grow. Next was the necessity for meaning and purpose, which, together with mindset, has the potential to strengthen one's resolve in their work. Mental health, mentorship, and management follow, and each is a domain that requires attention in any practice where confidence and competence are required as one leads and works with others.

### ***Mindset***

Carol Dweck (2008), author of *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, wrote about a growth versus a fixed mindset. Dweck stated that the fundamental difference between the two mindsets is openness and effort, knowing that learning and growing are processes that cannot be rushed. A person with a growth-mindset does not see adversity as failure, and they are willing to utilize what Dweck refers to as the power of *yet* (2014b): meaning, if a problem is too hard to be solved, a person with a growth-mindset will know the problem is not insurmountable, it just has not been solved, *yet*. These types of individuals face the good with humility and see the bad as a lesson or an experience, and an opportunity for growth. They learn from others, recognize their skills, and aim to achieve the same level of competence they admire in others. Dweck (2014a) noted that no matter how promising an ECT's skills or abilities were, they are more prepared for the profession's challenges if their goals reflect growth over perfection. Mindset, and an ability to reframe and reset, formed the basis of all four teachers' skills, as seen in the findings, where each persevered despite facing setbacks.

Sara, in particular, had a management philosophy and strategy that was rooted in a curriculum based on mindfulness. Mindfulness is a mindset that expresses awareness and

attention to the processes of all that we do, including growth. The MindUp Curriculum (Hawn Foundation, 2011) used by Sara, was comprised of lessons, which were “informed from theory and research in cognitive developmental neuroscience” (Maloney et al., 2016). The process for teaching MindUp happens in phases. Each of these phases were witnessed during all four observation in Sara’s classroom. For reference, the phases are included in Table 5.2 below.

**Table 5.2**

*MindUp Theory*

<b>Intervention Activities</b>	<b>Proximal Processes (Growth)</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 x daily mindful breathing.</li> <li>• Sustained attention on present moment experiences.</li> <li>• Practicing perspective taking, optimism, gratitude, savouring happy experiences.</li> <li>• Collectively engaging in acts of kindness to classmates and others in the community.</li> <li>• Shared experiences with classmates and teacher.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved mindful awareness of body and mind—thoughts, emotions, and behaviours, and sensations.</li> <li>• Improved self-regulation skills, including attention regulation, and inhibitory control.</li> <li>• Improved empathy, perspective-taking.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved pro-sociality.</li> <li>• Increased well-being.</li> <li>• Improved stress &amp; physiology.</li> <li>• Improved school success.</li> </ul>

*Note:* Adapted from Maloney et al. (2016)

Whether or not a program or model was followed, mindsets that were growth oriented and in tune with the needs of self and others, were evident in each of the teachers’ beliefs and actions: Beth’s personal constitution (pp. 106–107); Camille’s ability to see the big picture and focus on the strengths of her students, despite language barriers among other adversities; and Laura’s use of The Zones, which supported the use of regulating strategies and readiness for learning (Kuypers, 2011). Though each of the teacher’s expectations were high, mistakes were allowed and experiences, whether good or bad, were seen as opportunities to grow and flourish. Mindset, as an adaptive metacognitive process (Lin et al., 2005) was seen as a quality that, when cultivated, orients both teachers and students towards growth.

## *Meaning*

Meaning has been defined as having a sense of purpose, intent, significance, value, or importance in day to day life (Merriam-Webster, Online Dictionary, 2020). Kelly McGonigal (Ted Talk, 2013) suggested that “chasing meaning is better for your health than trying to avoid discomfort” (13:59), and this may be the reason why many find meaning in the pursuit of a passion or interest. Meaning has often been explored and celebrated in teacher education programs through discussions that focus on a teacher’s personal beliefs or statements that support the development of philosophical orientations, as teachers strive to discover who they are within their work. Teacher candidates practice metacognitive processes as they reflectively refine these statements in various assignments and as they participate in essential conversations around their practical teaching experiences. In these circumstances, they may have an opportunity to connect theory to practice. Finding meaning in one’s work can support motivation and help with a growth-oriented mindset, which can also help to mitigate stress (McGonigal, 2013).

Laura described teaching as “a calling”, stating that purpose and meaning helped her to remain passionate about her job, despite facing much adversity. A *calling orientation* is described as “a commitment to one’s work as it contributes to the greater good and makes the world a better place” (Turner & Thielking, 2019, p. 70). Laura found the most meaning in helping students with learning and mental health challenges, because she herself had struggled with dyslexia, anxiety, and ADHD throughout her life. These connections helped her to persevere through challenging times in the classroom; however, they also contributed to her own sense of well-being: “research has confirmed that finding meaning in life is a well-established route to psychological well-being” (Turner & Thielking, 2019, p. 70). Camille also commented, on several occasions, that if it were not for finding meaning and purpose in the work, many

would leave the profession due to its often difficult nature. Each of the ECTs expressed that at the core of their practice was the desire to do meaningful work and contribute to their community in meaningful ways; they felt that having a sense of purpose in a job well done strengthened their capacity to thrive.

### ***Mental Health***

Though many teachers enter the profession with optimism and excitement, some find the first few years to be the most stressful of their career (Lemisko, Hellsten, & Demchuk-Kosolofski, 2017). The stress of the profession can also last long term. In 2012, a comprehensive survey of urban teachers in Saskatoon and Regina reported that over 40% of teachers suffered from a high degree of emotional exhaustion, an indication of burnout, and over 60% of teachers became ill due to work related stress (Martin, Dolmage, & Sharpe, 2012). The teachers in this study agreed with these sentiments, saying that in their first few years as educators, they noticed an impact on their personal and mental health needs.

All four teachers noted increasing mental health needs, especially among students, and three out of the four stated that students' mental health and behavioural needs were immense. Each teacher talked about the lack of counselling supports in their schools, noting that parents and students would often turn to them for mental health support. Three of the four teachers also talked about their own need for personal counselling services; however, each participant expressed having people in their inner circle who understood the stress of their roles and were willing to engage in conversation about it. Mental health and education professionals, and scholars alike, recognize the importance of mental health skills and training for the twenty-first century teacher (Andrews, McCabe, & Wideman-Johnston, 2014). Many speak specifically to

the importance of teachers (not just ECTs) receiving mental health training in order to understand and support the needs of students:

To help combat the growing international trend of childhood and youth mental health problems, education must reorient their system to play an active role in promoting mental health and well-being of people. Specifically, education for the twenty-first century needs to examine their practices to develop education systems in which students are academically, behaviourally and socially supported. (Sheykhjan, 2016, p. 79)

In response to the growing needs of students and teachers, there has been much development in the area of Canadian mental health curricula over the last several years.

Senator Stan Kutcher (2016a), a Canadian psychiatrist, educator, and politician, supported the design of a website, modules, curricula, and professional development supports for students, educators and other professionals to learn about mental health and how to address it in schools. Participation in such training might become an essential component to prepare teachers moving forward. Mental health training and supports exist in many different forms and knowledge that contribute to the development of skills in this area could form the basis for an entire course on its own. Within the discipline there exists mental health literacy (Jorm et al., 1997; Kutcher et al., 2016a); mental health first aid (The Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2020); Applied Suicide Interventions and Skills Training (ASIST); training for behavioural and social-emotional disorders (Cooper, Smith, & Upton, 2002; Heath, Petrakos, Finn, Karagiannakis, Mclean–Heywood, & Rousseau, 2004; Ogundele, 2018) and brain-centric, trauma-sensitive training such as Bruce Perry’s (2013) Neuro-Sequential Model for Education (Barfield, Dobson, Gaskill, & Perry, 2012; Steele, 2017).

Many of these models provide useful information to anyone in a helping profession and from experience in these areas. I would say each supports the development of essential skills for teachers, given that they are professionals who spend many hours with children and youth, in a caregiving role. All four of the participants had either studied psychology, taken mental health training, or had personal experiences that allowed them to have an intimate connection with the need for awareness around mental health. Though the job of an educator differs from that of a psychotherapist, there are core competencies and practices from the disciplines of psychology and health that would support the development of essential mental health knowledge and skills in teachers. This knowledge supports personal wellness and builds a capacity for resilience, which encourages a supportive mindset when struggling students present with mental health-related challenges.

### ***Mentorship***

Smith and Ingersoll (2004) found that “having a mentor in one’s field reduced the risk of leaving at the end of the first year by about 30%, a result that was statistically significant” (p. 702). The effects of collegial relationships, mentorship, and camaraderie have been shown to have a remarkable impact on both teaching and learning, including on teacher mental health, wellness, and resilience (Lemisko, Hellsten, & Demchuk-Kosolofski, 2017). The same impact was seen in this study, as many personal and professional relationships contributed to the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that helped the ECTs thrive. From their mothers to administrators, each spoke affectionately about the leaders in their lives who inspired them to achieve their goals and seek support along the way. Having mentors in one’s life, whether at school, home, or in the community, can improve teaching quality by providing an outlet for the

stress and isolation experienced by the educator (Hellsten, Prytula, Ebanks, & Lai, 2009; Lemisko, Hellsten, & Demchuk-Kosolofski, 2017).

The participants' relationships with mentors supported their capacity for growth and reflective thought, and allowed space for stress, negative emotions, and challenges to be unpacked. The teachers in this study were particularly open to learning from their mentors, and each spoke about asking questions, seeking support, and maximizing collegial relations as having a positive impact on their confidence and competence within the work overall. Mentorship can be an essential feature of a successful induction, as it "is a promising and effective approach that supports personal and professional development which helps beginning teachers and their mentors thrive and flourish" (Lemisko, Hellsten, & Demchuk-Kosolofski, 2017, p. 1).

Despite the positive aspects of mentorship on the experiences of new teachers, Saskatchewan does not currently have a formal induction or mentorship process. The ECTs in this study fulfilled their need for quality mentors by reaching out to their administrative teams or colleagues, who they both admired and had good relationships with. All four ECTs spoke to emulating the strategies, strengths, and skills of their administrators and colleagues, as well as others in their personal lives, such as parents or friends who were also teachers. In addition to seeking out mentors, the ECTs served as mentors themselves. Though new to their role, each served as leaders among their school teams and had personal and professional experiences, ideas, and opinions that others found valuable.

### ***Management***

The complex nature of today's classrooms, which are growing multi-dimensionally, multi-culturally, and even multi-lingually every day, were reflected in the classrooms of the ECTs. These complexities require a diverse skill set. The teachers faced challenges as skilled

leaders and managers who ran their classrooms in an organized and routine manner, communicating and co-operating with students as decisions were made and problems were solved. Leadership and management skills are professional aptitudes that teachers must explicitly learn and practice. These aptitudes are often noted as either soft, twenty-first century, or conceptual skills (people skills) that can enhance one's practice in relation to the necessary human component of connecting to students and being their leader (Pachauri & Yadav, 2014). These skills are explored at length as they provide value to the profession of teaching.

Schulz (2008) found that the development of management skills can be supported through formal training and self-training. Pachauri and Yadav (2014) noted that these skills can be explicitly taught in stand-alone courses or embedded in others. The key, however, was that they be explicitly addressed to support teachers' multi-dimensional roles and expectations. When it comes to the teaching of management skills, especially those which must be employed in classrooms, it helps if they are approached and learned in ways that are authentic and realistic, meaning that TCs should have opportunities, in which these skills are embedded, to practice them and reflect on their learning and growth (Schulz, 2008).

Schulz suggests that if students are already social individuals, they can take advantage of everyday opportunities as a way to refine and practice skills:

A very pleasant way of self-training one's soft skills is frequent socialising with friends, colleagues and other members of society. This may sound astonishing, but meant here is socialising consciously, i.e. with the purpose in mind to enhance certain soft skills. We know already that in this way we can improve our small talk capabilities, but there are a lot of soft skills especially related to communication skills, which can be practiced while

chatting and discussing with others in an informal manner: e.g. language proficiency in general, listening, discussing, etiquette, self-esteem, or body language. (p. 152)

There are many categories of soft skills (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015), including “skilled and comfortable communication, collaboration and teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, leadership and responsibility, decision making, flexibility and adaptability, time management, initiative and self-direction, social and civic competencies, entrepreneurship,” and more (Devedzic et al., 2018, p. 283). Many of these skills are developed in pre-service programs where communication and collaboration are the norm. They are also explored through beliefs, philosophies, attention to personal growth, and relational engagements where students experience and develop attitudes, such as trust, transparent communication skills, and pro-social motivation.

While teacher candidates are being challenged to bring awareness and attention to the use of specific skills during group work, among other personal and professional pursuits, coursework for these individuals should be purposefully designed to offer opportunities for action and reflection. In addition, instructors in education programs could be explicitly teaching particular skills relevant to successful group work and team endeavours, just as one would wish for in-service teachers to do once in the classroom. It should be highlighted for TCs, that the benefits of group work go beyond the completion of an assignment, as they will practice valuable skills necessary for leading their students and working collegially on teams in their future roles. The explicit development of soft skills compliments that of hard skill development (i.e. subject specific skills), and they bring attention to personality traits, social nuances, language, habits, and other personal or interpersonal skill sets that are necessary to thrive in any role (Devedzic et al., 2018).

The participants in this study discussed practicing and improving upon many management related skills, doing so through diverse life experiences outside of teaching that contributed to their growth. Each also had authentic experiences where they reflected on the use of these skills with colleagues and administrators they admired. Overall, effective classroom management was not achieved through a system that used rewards or consequences. Though some management elements reflected pre-established models or programs, effective management was more of a process of understanding the innate needs of the humans in the space and the nuances of interpersonal connection. These connections fostered respectful treatment, thoughtful expectations, and classroom practices that focused on problem-solving and conflict resolution which were rooted in the conceptual skills each teacher possessed.

### **Implications**

As adaptive, observant, reflective, and compassionate thinkers and educators, the ECTs in this study approached all that they did metacognitively and thoughtfully. Each responded to their environments, on-going challenges, and changes with social, emotional, and instructional actions rooted in a desire to solve problems and support others. With an orientation towards growth, and a daily practice that supported meaningful and purposeful work, each had a background or set of experiences that helped to shape who they were as capable and confident educators. The commonalities among them, noted as being resilient, relatable, resourceful, and routine, were features of their personalities that helped them to face and overcome many obstacles, and when stuck, they were surrounded by a supportive community that influenced their perseverance and success.

Though more is known today about the profession of teaching than ever before (Stronge, 2018), there remains a gap from theory to practice that has been reflected in educational

literature for over 100 years (De Coninck, Valcke, Ophalvens, & Vanderlinde, 2019; Dewey, 1904). As a result of this gap, as many as half of all educators choose to leave the profession early, despite their years of training. This study sought to find thriving educators and learn from their success. The findings showed that, though diverse knowledge, skills, and practices can contribute to retention, certain personality features and personal or professional skills and strengths matter in the development of conceptual, technical, instructional, and pedagogical skills and practices. Much work remains to be done to bridge the gap from theory to practice; the features that emerged from this study, however, indicate that particular domains may be explored further in order to promote a thriving career.

With this work serving as a foundation, future research, experiential learning opportunities, coursework, and mentorship are explored next, in an effort to shape and refine traits, skills, and practices that may increase resilience and decrease attrition in caregiving professions. Huey and Hashim (2015) stated that “having the confidence and belief that [one] can meet their goals helps them to bounce back after setbacks. These are parts of resilience training that will reduce their risk to break under pressure” (p. 2). There is much about the nature of teaching that lies beyond one’s control (i.e., politics, organizational decisions, and many other contextual factors); however, people have the power to refine and strengthen their ability to face these complex factors. The personal and relational features of the four teachers in this study can be developed in others, and those who train teachers have the capacity to support this development through the experiences, relationships, and coursework they offer.

### **Considerations for Teacher Education**

It has been shown that in order for educators to thrive in supporting their students socially, emotionally, and academically, they must be knowledgeable and have developed their

own skills and attitudes in the areas of growth they wish to support (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Hoare, Bott, and Robinson (2017), in the title of their work, say, “Learn it, Live it, Teach it, and Embed it.” Additionally, their work notes that the core of motivational practices is personal engagement and a trust in the process, through developed experiences, attitudes, and actions. Examples from the participants’ lives and suggestions from the literature are used to inform considerations for personal and professional skill sets as domains of development for future teachers. The considerations are made with the noted Five Ms in mind, and fall into two categories: experiential and course-based.

1. **Mindset:** Possess a growth-oriented mindset, mindful, and thoughtful approach to work and life.
2. **Meaning:** Guided by a purpose; work and play have significance.
3. **Mental Health:** Possess an understanding of the stress emotions (anger, anxiety, depression); suicide or mental health first aid and training; participation in self-care; the impact of trauma; how to foster resilience; the role of self-regulation; and additional mental health knowledge or literacy.
4. **Mentorship:** Understand the importance of collaboration & camaraderie; reciprocally supportive relationships with peers, colleagues, and mentors.
5. **Management Skills:** Use of effective classroom management routines and communication skills, have confidence in the face of conflict, and utilize emotional regulation during tough conversations.

### **Consideration 1: Experiential**

Loughran and Russell (1997) wrote that “experience precedes understanding,” and as a constructivist concept, this saying, attributed to the work of Piaget (1936, 1971), refers to the

tenets of cognitive development which propose that we learn the most from our *experiences*. Experience provides opportunity to actively construct meaning out of learned knowledge. Scaffolded opportunities that include both action and reflection work well for the construction of knowledge. Therefore, three points in a teacher candidate's life journey are highlighted, from which learning through experience may enhance capacity for teacher strength: (a) life experiences (pre-entry to a degree program); (b) school-based experiences (during the degree program); and (c) guided experiences (post-graduation and into employment). Experiences can be used, in reflection, to gauge the application of one's skills. The experiential considerations covered herein, support an array of possibilities that could aid in strengthening resilience, problem-solving, critical thinking, and other tasks that rely heavily on metacognitive processes (Lester, Garofalo, & Kroll, 1989).

### ***Life Experiences: A Requirement for Teacher Training***

The teachers in this study engaged in many activities that helped them to develop techniques for coping with and managing stress. These skills presented as an essential foundation to a successful career. It would be key for aspiring educators to engage in activities, prior to and throughout their degree program, which allow them to build on these essential conceptual skills. Simply facing challenges in authentic environments can result in the development of many conceptual skills, including: relational skills, regulatory skills, resilience, emotional management, and skills that foster perseverance and resourcefulness, including the development of routines that can strengthen one's ability to lead and manage a group (Lester, Garofalo, & Kroll, 1989).

While teaching and leading (through various volunteer and work experiences), working on and refining skills had been part of the four ECTs' journeys for quite some time. Each spoke

of opportunities they had to refine necessary professional skills through life experiences, which were as essential to these ECTs' learning as their course work. Though each of the participants had student teaching and internship opportunities, they felt that these experiences were not enough to prepare them for the complexities of the classroom. The following opportunities were part of their journey:

- a. **Volunteer work:** Tutoring and assisting in classrooms; leading or counselling in camps; and participating in youth groups or acting in peer support roles were common among the ECTs.
- b. **Leadership roles or jobs working with children and youth:** Babysitting; managing youth camps; working as a psychologist or counsellor; or working as leaders in various capacities and roles, such as restaurant manager, contributed to a variety of management skills (i.e. twenty-first century or soft skills).
- c. **Post-Secondary education outside that of their B.Ed. experience:** Various other undergraduate degrees or attainment of additional degrees in post-graduate or certificate programs allowed for experiential learning opportunities in complex roles.

Even though each participant was new to the classroom, they were drawn to the profession through previous engagements with kids, management experiences, and educational pursuits that inevitably became the foundation for necessary classroom skills, procedures, and practices. Though the ECTs had classrooms that were at times diverse, stressful, and chaotic, they had acquired tools, rooted in their experiences, that supported efficacy, resilience, compassion, and competence in most situations. Therefore, it is recommended that the above-noted areas of experience be considered as possible requirements for admission into teacher

training programs and that on-going expectations include continued work with youth and leading, or supporting others. Self-inquiry could accompany these experiences and active-constructive learning could include assessing one's knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the areas of mindset, meaning, mental health, mentorship, or management, based on one's past and on-going experiences. If courses were offered that focused on these specific domains, TCs could further develop skills they felt were lacking, based on their interests and needs throughout their program.

### ***School-based Experiences: Teachers Candidates as Reflective Observers in the Classroom***

Sara and Beth in particular, noted that internships and substitute teaching provided some experience; however, they gleaned the most from spending time in classrooms as volunteers and watching expert teachers. During one of my reflections, I wondered about the potential of pre-service teachers first acquiring experience as educational assistants (EAs) in schools, as both Sara and Beth implied that would be an excellent opportunity for a pre-service teacher.

Experience in the classroom, from that particular lens, could provide an opportunity for TCs to work in classrooms, experiencing and refining their craft. Placing TCs in EA positions could also serve to support the current need for expensive one to one services in schools. A

recommendation from *Re-Imagine Education: 12 Actions for Education* (Saskatchewan, 2019) stated the following:

Human resources must be provided to support inclusion and create classrooms where every child can learn. This means providing educational assistants, Elders, speech-language pathologists, educational psychologists, counsellors, librarians, English as an additional language teachers and others to support classroom learning. (p. 12)

As an experiential consideration, teacher candidates working as educational assistants could prove problematic as there are vast differences in their respective roles; however, TCs could spend additional time in classrooms early in their experience as reflective observers and supporters in the school environment, prior to being required to student teach. This opportunity would take away the required lesson planning expected of candidates and allow for targeted observation and reflection. Immersed in school observation and reflection could happen early in an undergraduate program. TCs could align these engagements in schools with coursework and act as reflective candidates weekly, throughout a whole term or school year. The expectation would be to observe and learn from teachers, not to practice teach. This experience could give pre-service teachers a perspective on the complexities of the role, and like other life experiences, they could participate in corresponding self-study around developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Immersion in a classroom as an observer, as part of teacher education, could provide a foundation for setting personal and professional goals. It should be noted that this suggestion, though innovative, is not unheard of (Podolsky & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

The Banks Street College in New York, a non-profit graduate school of education, offers the experience of being an educational assistant to TCs as part of its Teacher Preparation for Deeper Learning (TPDL) program: the “strength of an assistant teaching placement is that it provides a coherent experience for TCs because they see how a teacher organizes a classroom and develops her practice” (pp. 102–103). Teachers in the Banks Street College spend a few days a week within the same classroom as EAs, all the while attending classes that ask them to reflect on those experiences. The only downside noted about the program was that the TCs were in the same classroom all term, learning from only one educator (Podolsky & Darling-Hammond, 2019). If this work was recreated in Saskatchewan, TCs could support classrooms as skilled

observers versus as substitute EAs, and they could work either half-time or full-time spending time in various classrooms throughout a school or community. As observers, these experiences would allow for diverse learning opportunities. In the Banks Street College, the EAs were paid for their work, earning money while attending teacher's college. In Saskatchewan, if the placements were part of one's pre-service program, school divisions would benefit from adding human resources, as TCs could provide some added supports throughout the school in a minimal capacity, while observing and supporting teachers as their main focus.

Teacher candidates would be qualified for this role as reflective observers in Saskatchewan schools early on in their program, as the expectations in the classroom would be minimal. This consideration highlights an experience not unlike the current student-teacher and internship programs, however, with a slightly shifted focus. As reflective observers the experience would be an added step in the experiential learning process that focused specifically on *observing* and *reflecting* on the practices of the co-operating teacher while providing minimal support to students. The experience would be provided before ever being expected to plan lessons or teach, allowing TCs an opportunity to observe, absorb the nuances of the space, and witness the characteristics and methods of a confident and competent teaching practice. In this work, TCs would be focused on refining and reflecting on personal and professional skills in a variety of conceptual domains before focusing on aspects pertaining to teaching.

Some of the most recent research conducted in Saskatchewan (Re-Imagine Education, 2019) challenges educators and stakeholders in the province to be bold and think outside the boundaries of traditional educational models to support the growing and changing needs in classrooms. Wang, Spalding, Odell, Klecka, and Lin (2010) also speak to the notion of being bold when it comes to teacher education:

Teacher education and teaching are complex professional practices that can be conceptualized in a variety of ways that offer different implications for teacher learning. Characteristics of practice should be understood and considered as attempts are made to reform teaching and teacher education. These characteristics of practice should not preclude the suggestion of bold ideas to guide the reform of teaching and teacher education, especially fresh, creative, innovative, and empirically sound ideas, strategies, and perspectives, whether they are generated internally or externally. (p. 13)

As observers first in classrooms, TCs would be challenged, beyond the day to day requirements of teaching, to seek out role models and reflect on and participate in personal and professional development in areas where they felt they needed the most support.

### ***Guided Experiences Through Mentorship***

The above-noted considerations highlight several means by which teacher candidates could strengthen their own skill sets through observation and practice in pre-service training. However, experiential learning should also occur through the induction phase of one's career, with formal relational guidance and support through mentorship. Whether or not they participated in formal mentorship, the teachers in this study sought out and cultivated meaningful mentor-mentee relationships to support them in their practice. Each teacher also had the benefit of an administrative team that provided exceptional leadership and support. The teachers' self-esteem and confidence were encouraged by administrators who trusted them and provided them with opportunities to grow and also share their areas of expertise.

The participants noted that they were able to recognize the qualities of excellent leaders and mentors and compare them to the qualities of those who lacked in such roles. They expressed that the relationship worked best in organically nurtured environments and that helpful

mentorship came from leaders who were caring, understanding, and trusting. The participants in this study, however, also had the relational skills to seek out mentors and even mentor others, which suggests that there are quality teacher-leaders, either new to the profession or with years of service, who could fulfill mentorship roles within any given school community. It is recommended that all schools explicitly seek those with the relational skills (Rowley, 1999) seen in the four participants to provide mentorship to ECTs. Mentors could be veteran teachers or new teachers, as it was evident these ECTs had many leadership qualities that supported them and may serve others in the capacity to thrive.

### **Consideration 2: Course-Based**

This section discusses the potential for skill development through course work at the pre-service or in-service level, which could take place in tandem with the above noted suggestions or be offered on its own to support resilience in the profession. Each of the participants had common characteristics that strengthened their practice (the Four Rs). It is recommended that, among other characteristics, these could be cultivated through the domains of mindset, meaning, mentorship, mental health, and management skills, which have been taught in various other disciplines and are noted to be teachable domains and viable sources of character development (Dweck, 2008, 2014; Klaus, 2009; Ritter, Small, Mortimer, & Doll, 2018; Robles, 2012; Schulz, 2008).

Gadusova and Predanocyova (2018) emphasised three levels of influence, defined as necessary areas of development in teacher education: “cognitive (abilities, dispositions, knowledge, and intelligence), affective (emotions, feelings, experiences, motivation, social relations, and self-regulation) and psychomotor (movement, sensory perception, skills, habits, manners)” (p. 104). These domains were first explored by Bloom (1956,1964). Gadusova and

Predanocyova (2018) recommend developing these areas in educators through various methods, which in turn could be developed in students as integrated skills; a process noted in many discussions around the nature of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015).

Explicitly utilizing research and literature related to each of the Five Ms to create a course that allows for an opportunity to refine, focus, and reflect on these skills and qualities could be a place to start. Alternatively, the five domains could be integrated into various courses in multiple educational disciplines that provide space for their exploration. For example, each of the concepts is relevant to curriculum, educational psychology, educational administration, and educational foundations, depending on the perspective from which they are approached.

The five domains could be used as themes to support readings, experiences, collaborative group work, and reflective assignments in a course that was focused on any number of the following skills: the development of meaning and purpose in work and play; mindset and reframing thoughts for an orientation towards growth; soft skills, i.e. personal skills and conceptual skills that support management of stress and emotional regulation; interpersonal skills, linked to emotional intelligence; cognitive flexibility, communication, and conflict management skills; mentorship opportunities through targeted teamwork or group work, that included the development of group norms, work ethic and an understanding that conflict and mistakes can support learning and growth; and self-esteem building opportunities that support overall well-being and a sense of efficacy.

This coursework would involve personal and professional development through action and research and regardless of delivery, the work should involve elements of self-study and personal inquiry aimed at developing confidence. If taught as explicit areas of focus in teacher

preparation programs, each domain serves to increase protective factors against stress and burnout. Practices and skills that support strength and build resilience in teachers can be applied in classrooms and transferred to support student well-being as well (Day & Gu, 2013). Teo (2019) made the following recommendations, in regards to the affective needs of students and teachers alike:

This creates a need for students [both teacher candidates and students in K – 12] to go beyond the learning of content knowledge and examination skills to being equipped with a more holistic education that emphasizes life skills like communication, creativity, cross-cultural collaboration and understandings, and critical thinking” (p. 170).

As Hoare, Bott, and Robinson (2017) found, it was best when teachers practiced what they taught: *learn it, live it, teach it, and embed it*; promoting a sense of well-being through personal action and reflection. This practice aligns with the belief that one cannot teach by simply telling others what to do, they must teach by showing, through integrative practices from which both leader and learner have knowledge and experience. Hoare et al. further expressed that in order for well-being to be promoted through the development of positive education, i.e. education that incorporates aspects of meaning, mindset, mental health, mentorship, and management (though different terminology was used in their work), it was imperative to focus on affective domains of development.

Kutsyuruba et al. (2019) found that thriving teachers cultivated a work-life balance; nurtured a positive mindset; committed to reflective practices; and consulted, connected, and collaborated well with others, noting that these strengths fostered resilience and an ability to “flourish” in the face of adversity (p. 287). I propose that if these skills can be developed and refined through early coursework in pre-service programs, educators may recognize and develop

the foundation for lifelong learning practices that could support their resilience throughout their careers. Ideally, these practices would also help to form lifelong wellness habits such as finding meaning or purpose in the work, further the development of a growth-mindset, and support continued learning around mental health and management, all of which would occur in environments where teachers can be mentored by, as well as mentor, others.

If decreasing teacher attrition remains a goal, educators must be provided with opportunities to refine the skills that will protect them from burnout. With serious mental health and behavioural needs increasing for both teachers and students, classrooms have become places where teachers are required to manage their own emotions and stress, as well as attend to the needs of their students so that all may thrive. Without coursework that explicitly attends to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that help teachers become thriving practitioners, there may be consistent increases in attrition rates and a potential decline in interest towards the profession. It has been suggested in previous works that teachers be trained “to seek and create support for themselves in the early years of teaching” (Woolfolk & Burke, 2005, p. 353). The five domains presented in this study inform methods that give teachers the ability to explore personal beliefs, practices, and skills that can build an effective practice upon their strengths.

### ***Mentorship Training Programs***

The fact that mentorship programs are not in place upon induction to teaching in many Saskatchewan school divisions, has been seen as a detriment to the profession, and mentorship has been previously highlighted as an area worthy of further development in the province (Hellsten, Prytula, Ebanks, & Lai, 2009; Lemisko, Hellsten, & Demchuk-Kosolofski, 2017). With no formal mentorship training programs in existence in Saskatchewan, it is recommended that the province (Ministry of Education and Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation) work together

with school divisions and teacher training programs to maintain quality mentors in every school by training mentors to support teacher retention. Quality mentorship is encouraged by the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation; yet, not all administrators and veteran teachers may have the capacity to fulfill the needs of this role. The relational aspects that support the attributes of quality mentors could be explored with action research in schools and the qualities of good mentors could be further refined. Undergraduate and post-graduate training programs could offer courses for those interested in mentorship. The skills recommended previously, for undergraduate course development, could also be instilled through coursework developed for educational administrators to increase capacity for quality mentor-mentee relationships. Post-degree courses could also facilitate opportunities for skill development related to the Four Rs and Five Ms, as it has been found these features can be taught. Considering mentorship has been known to have a significant influence on teacher retention (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004) investment in mentorship programs and training for teachers and administrators as mentors should be an essential piece of future work in support of teacher retention in the province.

### **Future Directions**

This study employed a qualitative case study methodology to learn from a small sample of early career teachers. From this group, a rigorous thematic analysis helped to collate themes related to personality features of each teacher (Four Rs), and domains related to areas of personal and professional development (Five Ms). Implications and considerations shared the potential for further exploration in support of teachers' experiential learning opportunities and the development of coursework to strengthen teaching practice. In addition, it was suggested that improvements be made to mentorship programs as they are needed in the profession. Future

directions expand on these considerations briefly by providing deeper connections to past and future research explorations related to this work.

With the above-noted considerations in mind, four areas for future research based on this work are proposed: 1) study replication and reaffirmation of findings; 2) experiential learning explorations through teacher candidates as reflective observers; 3) a study involving the course-based considerations, designed to facilitate learning in the five domains; and 4) formal research around quality mentorship and the potential for mentorship training programs in the province of Saskatchewan. The potential for research on this topic would be timely, as the strain on classrooms and teachers, and the pressure to support well-being in schools, has been recognized by many (Friedman, 2006; Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). Given that this study was published during a global pandemic, and much more uncertainty and stress impacts schools today, there is no better time to explore the development of meaning, mindset, mental health, mentorship, and management in educational settings. Each of the Five Ms serve as an avenue for strengthening teacher resilience to cope with the adversities of life, which, if cultivated in teachers, can be taught to students. Strength in adverse times may help many to overcome situations like the one our world found itself in just this year.

### **Strengthening Teacher Capacity for a Thriving Career: Replication of Findings**

This study was small and qualitative in nature; however, there was depth to the findings and the results support meaningful applications of the themes. It would be beneficial to replicate or extend this work in any one of the four areas mentioned, in a variety of school divisions, both urban and rural. A replicated study in an elementary or secondary school environment might add to the development of the original themes, confirm the validity of the findings, or bring to light altogether new ideas not expressed herein. With the use of Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of

thematic analysis as a step-by-step guide, a similar framework could be used to collect and disseminate data for comparison. Additional explorations of findings, from others who were thriving, or seen as experts in their discipline, has the potential to add to the domain of competent teaching and uncover additional features of a thriving practice. A replicated study could purposefully seek to speak to a diverse group of teachers: teachers who identify as LGBTQ; teachers of a gender other than the female participants identified in this work; First Nations, Inuit, or Metis educators; or other culturally diverse groups of teachers.

Replicating the study with the same participants four to six years from the date of this study is also a consideration. Through a different methodology, such as narrative inquiry (Creswell, 2013), participants could be contacted for follow up interviews. It would be of significant contribution to the literature to hear from the same teachers, who, by year five to eight would be well in to the phase of their careers noted by Huberman (1989) as a period of *stabilization*. By this second phase of a teacher's professional life cycle it has generally been considered that ECTs who have *survived* are staging forward to either a prosperous lifelong career or they will have decided to leave the profession altogether (Huberman, 1989). The ECTs in this study were thriving when many are in a process of *self-discovery* and *survival* (Huberman, 1989). To follow up a few years into their service in the profession with a retrospective inquiry could yield an interesting narrative of their "stories lived and told" to that point in their careers (Creswell, 2013, p. 70). Similar to this interpretive case study herein, a narrative inquiry could provide a collaborative approach between researcher and participants whereby the interactions and dialogue yield rich data from which new perspectives could be understood (Creswell, 2013).

### **Strengthening Teacher Capacity for a Thriving Career: Experiential Learning**

Beyond study replication, to confirm or refine the findings as they may apply to teacher education, the next possibility could be to look to experiences that could be studied as opportunities for personal and professional development in teacher education. A case study could investigate the idea of a cohort of TCs being placed in schools as reflective observers, preferably early on in their program. Students would pay attention to and learn from the competencies (successes and challenges) noted in the teachers and themselves, and develop awareness as to their limits and areas for potential growth. Teacher candidates could work in classrooms one to two days a week observing teacher skills and practice and reflecting on personal strengths and areas for growth only. A course could be aligned with this experience and TCs could simultaneously attend to personal and professional skills in the five domains (Five Ms). The defining features of this investigation would be to trial the usefulness and benefit to both schools and TCs as they worked as observers in an experience of self-study before being called to design and teach lessons.

### **Strengthening Teacher Capacity for a Thriving Career: Development of Coursework**

With the changing needs of students and teachers impacting rates of attrition in North America, it is safe to say that there is a pressing need for research around building teacher capacity for resilience: “research on teacher resilience could benefit from more longitudinal, mixed methods studies with large samples, to complement the smaller scale studies that have teased out characteristics associated with teacher resilience in specific contexts” (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011, p. 195). This study highlighted that teachers could benefit from increased opportunities to explore coursework that improves well-being, builds resilience, and strengthens personal and professional practice, aiding teachers to be champions of their students’

well-being as well. Though an extensive review of literature was conducted for this study, it was not explicitly for the purpose of providing a foundation for coursework around each of the Five Ms. A thorough assessment of both current practices in teacher education, as well as need in the respective domains, could provide perspective and support coursework development.

At one point, I reflected on whether or not these elements were teachable qualities or innate aspects of the ECTs themselves. I believe there exists the potential for measurable or discernable results from further study around these themes. For example, research has shown that resilience, among a set of many other skills, formerly thought to be innate, can actually be *learned*. Beltman, Mansfield, and Price (2011) explained the process of resilience as an adaptive and learnable skill:

Resilience [is] a process of adaptation rather than a set of individual attributes. In this process individuals are regarded as active agents who employ strategies to overcome adversities faced in their environment. Many papers offered recommendations for pre-service programmes, such as developing various personal attributes and skills, building a climate of resilience at university and remaining connected with graduates into the early years of teaching. (p. 191)

Duckworth and Yeager (2015) also explored a variety of affective qualities. These qualities were in contrast to the cognitive domains typically evaluated in educational contexts. Their exploration was performed in an effort to understand qualities outside of (but not unrelated to) cognitions that influence teaching and learning, decision making, and well-being, or in other words, the ability to thrive personally and professionally. They explored an abundance of literature related to understanding innate human traits and qualities, with respect to pinpointing, measuring, and offering suggestions for their potential for growth in educational contexts.

Duckworth and Yeager (2015) found that personal, innate qualities could in fact be defined, learned, and measured in a number of professions:

Quantifying, even imperfectly, the extent to which people express self-control, gratitude, purpose, growth mind-set, collaboration, emotional intelligence, and other beneficial personal qualities has dramatically advanced scientific understanding of their development, impact on life outcomes, and underlying mechanisms. It is no surprise that policymakers and practitioners have grown increasingly interested in using such measures for diverse purposes other than theory development. Given the advantages, limitations, and medium-term potential of such measures, our hope is that the broader educational community proceeds forward with both alacrity and caution, and with equal parts optimism and humility [in pursuit of]...the many positive personal qualities other than cognitive ability that contribute to well-being and achievement. (p. 17)

Teacher candidates could participate in explicit skill building around the attributes and skills that contribute to self-reliance and resilience. As an extension of this work, they could be followed for a period of up to five years in a qualitative study that seeks to understand the efficacy of teacher training in relation to the challenges presented in the first five years of teaching.

### **Strengthening Teacher Capacity for a Thriving Career: Mentorship**

Another meaningful direction for furthering this work could also be to look at formal study around the development of teacher mentorship programs in Saskatchewan. A narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) with a cohort of people in mentor-mentee relationships could be completed, accounting for potential experiences of those who may benefit from mentorship and remain in the profession. Conversely, a mixed methods study could follow newly

inducted teachers through experiences in mentorship beyond their first five years, assessing the benefit of mentorship programs as teachers move past the early stages of their career.

### **Concluding Statements**

For four Saskatchewan teachers, the complexities of the profession were navigated through similar features of character, each in various domains, that had been developed through experiences over the course of their pre-service and early career lives. The culmination of this work revealed four common features among the teachers' personalities (resilience, relatability, resourcefulness, and routine) and these features supported strength in the early parts of their career. The ECTs also utilized conceptual knowledge and skills to manage adversity, as each possessed personal and professional abilities and attitudes, in five domains, that could be emphasized in teacher training programs or studied further. The domains of meaning, mindset, mental health, mentorship, and management contributed to confidence and competence, allowing the participants to thrive, all the while meeting the expectations of their role and navigating professional stressors with grace.

This study provided a reflective look into the current dynamics and stressors of twenty-first century classrooms in Saskatchewan. Despite reflecting on a small, qualitative sample of teachers from one school division, the study highlighted relevant and necessary areas for future development. If teachers are the most important factor affecting classroom outcomes related to student social-emotional, behavioural, and academic success (Aud et al., 2012), then investing in research, training, and experiences that further the skills needed to be a confident, competent, and resilient practitioner is imperative. This inquiry confirmed that early career teaching can be a time of high stress; despite this, the ECTs who participated in this study were *thriving*. One of the most significant take-aways from this work was the fact that stress can be mitigated if

teachers possess certain knowledge, skills, and attitudes. If these findings can be expanded upon or further explored, they may benefit future educators, and *hundreds* of their students, for years to come.

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## Appendix A

### Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation: Standards of Practice May 2, 2018

#### Available from:

[https://www.stf.sk.ca/sites/default/files/standards\\_of\\_practice.pdf](https://www.stf.sk.ca/sites/default/files/standards_of_practice.pdf)

### 6.3

### Standards of Practice

These are the core principles of competent teaching practice for Saskatchewan teachers, expressed as commitments to standards of practice, each of which teachers may demonstrate in various ways throughout their careers:

#### Commitments to Standards of Practice

- 6.3.1 To create and maintain a learning environment that encourages and supports the growth of the whole student.
- 6.3.2 To strive to meet the diverse needs of students by designing the most appropriate learning experiences for them.
- 6.3.3 To demonstrate and support a repertoire of instructional strategies and methods that are applied in teaching activities.
- 6.3.4 To develop teaching practices that recognize and accommodate diversity within the classroom, the school and the community.
- 6.3.5 To carry out professional responsibilities for student assessment and evaluation.
- 6.3.6 To demonstrate a professional level of knowledge about the curriculum and the skills and judgment required to apply this knowledge effectively.
- 6.3.7 To implement the provincial curriculum conscientiously and diligently, taking into account the context for teaching and learning provided by students, the school and the community.
- 6.3.8 To reflect upon the goals and experience of professional practice and adapt one's teaching accordingly.
- 6.3.9 To work with colleagues in mutually supportive ways and develop effective professional relationships with members of the educational community.
- 6.3.10 To conduct all professional relationships in ways that are consistent with principles of equity, fairness and respect for others in accordance with the beliefs of the profession.

## Appendix B

### Ministry of Education Plan for 2018 / 2019

Can be found at:

<http://publications.gov.sk.ca/documents/15/106265-EducationPlan1819.pdf>

#### Ministry Goal

Community supports for all learners province-wide are strengthened.

#### Key Actions

- ⇒ Embed Student First practices and response to Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action within Ministry and inter-ministry strategies (e.g. ESSP, Poverty Reduction Strategy, Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan).
- ⇒ Renewal and implementation of the *Caring and Respectful School* policy to support student mental well-being and promote positive school climate. In addition, plans for student safety will be addressed.
- ⇒ Continue to support the Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan, in particular, through Mental Health First Aid training for the education sector.
- ⇒ Continue to support initiatives for Francophone minority education and second language instruction.
- ⇒ Renew secondary curricula including computer coding and supports for instruction, especially in mathematics.
- ⇒ Respond to the recommendations from the Curriculum Advisory Committee.
- ⇒ Work with the Ministry of Health to construct a public education and harm reduction website about cannabis to assist families in initiating conversations with children and youth so they are aware of consequences and to help them make healthy choices.

## Appendix C

### The Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board (SPTRB) Teacher Certification Competencies

#### Schedule H

Registrants of the Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board shall:

1. Create and maintain an environment that encourages and demonstrates a commitment to student learning and student well-being.
2. Demonstrate a professional level of knowledge about the curriculum and the skills and judgment required to apply this knowledge effectively.
3. Demonstrate and support a repertoire of instructional strategies and methods that are applied in teaching activities.
4. Carry out professional responsibilities for student assessment and evaluation.
5. Reflect upon the goals and experience of professional practice, and adapt one's teaching accordingly.
6. Work with colleagues in mutually supportive ways and develop effective professional relationships with members of the educational community.
7. Conduct all professional relationships in ways that are consistent with principles of equity, fairness and respect for others.

Competencies outlined online in the SPTRB Brochure :

[https://www.sptrb.ca/WEB/Documents/SPTRB\\_TeacherCertificationCompetencies\\_Brochure\\_E\\_N.pdf](https://www.sptrb.ca/WEB/Documents/SPTRB_TeacherCertificationCompetencies_Brochure_E_N.pdf)

In Saskatchewan, teacher candidates are expected to be able to demonstrate:

- (a) a professional attitude focused on ethical behavior, equity, and service;
- (b) knowledge of the historic and current contexts of Saskatchewan and Canada, the impacts of our colonial past, and an understanding of how knowledge is incorporated and transformed into school curricula;
- (c) the ability to differentiate instruction and assessment reflective of learning needs, and;
- (d) an ability to align planning, instruction and Saskatchewan curricular outcomes in order to respond to learner needs in developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive ways, with a particular focus on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit knowledge, content and perspectives.

In particular, teacher candidates who complete their teacher education in programs in Saskatchewan are expected to be able to demonstrate competence in the following areas:

#### 1. Professional Competencies:

- ✓ demonstrates the ability to maintain respectful, mutually supportive and equitable professional relationships with learners, colleagues, families and communities;
- ✓ demonstrates ethical behaviour and the ability to work in a collaborative manner for the good of all learners;
- ✓ demonstrates a commitment to social justice and the capacity to nurture an inclusive, equitable and culturally responsive environment for the empowerment of all learners;
- ✓ demonstrates a commitment to service and the capacity to be reflective, lifelong learners and inquirers.

#### 2. Knowledge Competencies:

- ✓ demonstrates knowledge of how the Canadian colonial context, especially in reference to Saskatchewan and Western Canada, impacts teaching and learning for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples;
- ✓ demonstrates knowledge of First Nations, Métis & Inuit culture and history, (e.g. treaties, residential school, scrip and worldview) and their impacts on contemporary experiences and relationships;
- ✓ demonstrates knowledge of a number of subjects taught in Saskatchewan schools (disciplinary/interdisciplinary knowledge);
- ✓ demonstrates an understanding of the organizational and legal contexts of schooling;
- ✓ demonstrates proficiency in the language of instruction;
- ✓ demonstrates ability to use technologies readily, strategically and appropriately;
- ✓ demonstrates ability to strive for/pursue new knowledge.

#### 3. Instructional Competencies:

- ✓ demonstrates the ability to use educational research, inquiry, and data for planning, instructional and assessment purposes;
- ✓ demonstrates the ability to utilize meaningful, equitable and holistic approaches to assessment and evaluation;
- ✓ demonstrates the ability to use a wide variety of responsive instructional strategies and methodologies to accommodate learning styles of individual learners and support their growth as social, intellectual, physical and spiritual beings.

#### 4. Curricular Competencies:

- ✓ demonstrates knowledge of Saskatchewan curriculum and policy documents and applies this understanding to plan lessons, units of study and year plans using curriculum outcomes as outlined by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education;
- ✓ demonstrates the ability to incorporate First Nations, Métis, and Inuit knowledge, content and perspectives into all teaching areas; and
- ✓ demonstrates the capacity to engage in program planning to shape 'lived curriculum' that brings learner needs, subject matter, and contextual variables together in developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive and meaningful ways.

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## Appendix D

### Letter to School Administrators Winter 2018

Dear School-Based Administrator;

I am writing to seek volunteer teachers for a qualitative case study that would last over a period of eight to ten weeks, ending by June 2019 at the latest. This study would involve four ½ day in class observations, and teacher interviews to take place in your school. The topic of the study is, *Understanding The Teaching Practices of Early Career Teachers who Promote Safe, Well Managed Learning Environments*. The purpose of this study is aimed at understanding four core aspects of teaching, which will look at how these competent teachers:

- a) Prepare and set up the learning environment;
- b) Teach, instruct, and adapt;
- c) Manage the needs of safety, comfort, and diversity of students;
- d) And relate and / or build relationships in the context of their classrooms.

The competencies noted above are summarized from the Ministry of Education Strategic Plans (2018) and the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation Standards of Professional Practice (2018). See attached as Appendices A and B.

Overarching study questions for this research project are:

1. How do competent and / or thriving early career teachers construct pedagogical knowledge?
2. How do competent and / or thriving early career teachers foster positive, safe, well-managed learning environments?
3. What skills have competent and / or thriving teachers acquired, where have they acquired them, and how have they become adept at using them?
4. What decisions and plans do competent and / or thriving teachers make in order to support management, learning, and overall student safety, comfort, and success?
5. What qualities (behaviours, characteristics, or attributes) do competent and / or thriving teachers possess?
6. How and why are decisions made or applied in competent and / or thriving teachers' classrooms?

As a school-based administrator you have the knowledge to identify teachers who you believe are/ or have become competent teachers in your school and who are within their first five years of teaching. Competent teachers are teachers who meet the majority of the attached criteria from the Ministry and our province's Teachers' Federation. If you have such educators in your building, I would kindly ask that you make the study known to them by passing on this

introductory letter and attached information and notifying them that they may contact me or Dr. Kalyn directly to participate.

Please do not pressure or convince potential teachers to participate, as their participation has no bearing on their position within the school. Once I have been contacted by teachers, I will be contacting them directly by email or phone to discuss the risks, benefits, and commitment to this study and seek their permission and consent to participate. No teacher is obligated to participate and I ask that you provide them with all information in this email when you approach them as a potential participant. Specifically, please provide the attached criteria as Appendices A and B, and be sure teachers are aware there is no pressure to agree to participate. Should they agree please ask them to contact me directly at [judy.fernuk@usask.ca](mailto:judy.fernuk@usask.ca).

The findings may support the collation of ideas and strategies that may support other educators early in their practice and it also may support pre-service teacher education programs in our province. Your willingness to submit the name of teachers who meet these criteria in your building will be honoured and respected through practices that respect confidentiality for your school, the teacher's, and your community.

Teachers will be made aware that their participation or lack thereof holds no bearing on their standing in the school or with respect to their relationship with yourself or their school division. It is intended that there will be no extra work for the teacher. They will be observed during the regular teaching they do and no requests for changes in instruction or planning will be asked of them. In addition, I will provide teachers with a letter to send home with students and families to provide awareness to the study of teacher practices. No students will be interviewed or specifically observed for the sake of this study.

The researcher will also respect school time and teacher practice in such a way that is least disruptive to teacher time and the learning environment. This research will include: four in class observations lasting one half day each over the course of two to four months (March to June 2019). Four informal interviews with teachers will also take place at an appropriate time that works for the teacher, and four debriefing sessions with reflections will be offered, but not mandatory, to support the work.

Each interview will last approximately 30 – 60 minutes.

Please note, no in school observations will be scheduled without first gaining permission from the teacher and administrator and notifying parents. Interviews will be audio-recorded and stored for transcription in a password protected iPhone and on a password protected computer owned privately by the researcher. Classroom observations will not be recorded. No identifiable information will be included in written or recorded notes and each participant will be only be identified by a number or pseudonym throughout the data collection, analysis, and reporting phases.

In addition, the school's identity will be masked in any research outputs.

The results of this study will be used to complete a dissertation through the cross-departmental PhD program in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan and this research has been approved both by Saskatoon Public Schools and The University of Saskatchewan

Behavioural Ethics Review Board. This research will be published as a dissertation and potentially further published as an article in a scholarly journal and/or presented at a conference or to fellow Graduate students and professors.

Though others may see the presence of a researcher in the school the details of the project will remain confidential and not disclosed to others by the researcher.

Thank you very much for your time in considering this worthy research and for submitting the names of teachers in your schools who you feel are competent in their practice and in the first five years of their careers.

The contact credentials for this research are listed below:

**Research Supervisor:**

Dr. Brenda Kalyn: (306) 966-7566  
Department of Curriculum Studies  
College of Education  
University of Saskatchewan  
[Brenda.kalyn@usask.ca](mailto:Brenda.kalyn@usask.ca)

**Graduate Student:**

Judy Jaunzems-Fernuk:  
PhD Candidate - Curriculum Studies  
College of Education  
University of Saskatchewan  
[judy.fernuk@usask.ca](mailto:judy.fernuk@usask.ca)

If you have questions regarding the study, please feel free to contact myself, or my supervisor, Dr. Brenda Kalyn at the telephone numbers provided above or through my confidential email address.

This study has been approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board, University of Saskatchewan on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Any questions regarding your rights as a nominator or participant may be addressed to the Ethics Office toll free at 1-888-966-2084.

Once a teacher comes forward to participate, arrangements will be made for signing the following consent documents (See attached). All in-school visits are scheduled to be completed by June 2019 at the latest.

Thank you,  
Sincerely,  
Judy Jaunzems-Fernuk

## Appendix E

### Consent to Participate in Research Study

Dear Participant,

Your participation is being sought for the purpose of a research project titled: *Understanding Exemplary Teaching Practice and the Skills, Attributes, and Behaviours of Early Career Teachers who Promote Safe, Well Managed Learning Environments*. The purpose of this study is aimed at understanding four core aspects of teaching, which will look at how exemplary teachers:

- e) Prepare and set up the learning environment;
- f) Teach, instruct, and adapt;
- g) Manage the needs of safety, comfort, and diversity of students;
- h) And relate and / or build relationships in the context of their classrooms.

The qualifiers for ‘exemplary teaching practice’ are summarized from the Ministry of Education Strategic Plans (2018) and the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation Standards of Professional Practice (2018).

Overarching study questions for this research project are:

1. What knowledge, skills, or attitudes (competencies) do thriving ECTs possess?
2. How does the development of particular knowledge, skills, or attitudes (competencies) contribute to thriving in the profession of teaching?
3. How has the knowledge, skills, or attitudes (competencies) present in thriving ECTs been attained or refined?

Your perspective and insight into your current classroom and your practices will be vital to developing theory around exemplary teaching practices. This is not to say you do not experience challenges within your practice; however it will be an exercise in understanding how you overcome and manage the daily on-goings of classroom life. Data will be collected and collated along with three other participants over the course of four school visits each to support the development themes that may generate theory around exemplary teaching practice. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to contact me, or my supervisor, Dr. Brenda Kalyn, with any additional questions you might have.

**Research Supervisor:**

Dr. Brenda Kalyn: (306) 966-7566  
Department of Curriculum Studies  
University of Saskatchewan  
Brenda.kalyn@usask.ca

**Graduate Student:**

Judy Jaunzems-Fernuk: (306) 380-3770  
PhD Candidate – Curriculum Studies  
University of Saskatchewan  
[judy.fernuk@usask.ca](mailto:judy.fernuk@usask.ca)

This research project will offer you the opportunity to reflect on aspects of your current classroom dynamics and practice, and ask you to think about what you find to be successful strategies to promote calm or effective learning environments (effective or exemplary practice will be defined by the attached Ministry of Education and Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation documents, 2018). You have been nominated to participate in this project because your school administrator feels you offer elements of exemplary practice in your daily work as a general classroom teacher. There are no requirements for you to participate in this study and your participation or lack of will not affect any standing at your school or within your school division. For the purpose of this research project, four volunteer participants will be sought for interviews, observations, communication, and reflection regarding the realities of classroom life, that may include: teaching and management; behaviour, attributes, skills of yourself or the students; and possible mental health concerns, stress, or stress management for yourself and / or students. Your school division and the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board are fully aware of this research and are in support of it.

Through four monthly visits, individual interviews with yourself, lasting approximately 30 -60 minutes each, and classroom observations, lasting approximately one half-day each, will be scheduled. Through this experience, I hope to further understand teacher attributes, practices, skills, and behaviour's with respect to the noted elements of exemplary practice. Should you consent to participating, you will partake in a visit that includes an interview, observation, and reflection, once a month for four months (a total of four visits). Each visit will be audio recorded using my password protected iPhone. You may withdraw consent from the study at any time without cause or penalty and all data collected up to the date of withdrawal would be destroyed.

As this study is voluntary, you have the right to ask for any recordings, observations, or interviews to be stopped at any point in time and you have permission to view transcripts or listen to recordings upon request. Recordings will be transcribed at various times throughout the extent of the research project and if you wish to withdraw at any point, the transcripts will be destroyed and not used for the project. We ask that you should you choose to withdraw, you do so on or before the date of the last scheduled interview, which would be approximately June 2019. After this point your data will become part of the study indefinitely as it is written up in the analysis phase.

The researcher will undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of any discussions and only the researcher will have access to any original data collected. During collection and analysis, the data gathered from the study, including audio recordings and transcripts, will be stored in a locked cabinet in the Researcher's home. Any digital information will be stored on a computer secured with a password or a password protected iPhone. Upon completion of the study data will be kept in a secure location at the University of Saskatchewan for a period of up to five years, by

Dr. Brenda Kalyn, Department of Curriculum Studies. All data will be kept in accordance with the University of Saskatchewan ethics guidelines.

The results of this study will be used to complete a dissertation through the cross-departmental PhD program in the College of Education. The research may be further published as an article in a scholarly journal and/or presented at a conference or to fellow Graduate students and professors. As a participant, you will not be identified in any way in the data collection process, in the writing of the dissertation, or any future articles or presentations.

Confidentiality and anonymity will be respected with the exception of your administrator who will have nominated you and coworkers who may witness classrooms observations, or meetings within the school. Though others may know of or witness personal interactions the content of the discussions and focus or intent of the work will not be known to others unless you tell them. The researcher will not disclose the reasons for being in the school other than to spend time in your classroom. In order to remain confidential you will be given a pseudonym (fake name) in any written work or published work as a result of this study. Throughout the data collection phase your recordings and notes will only be known by a number: participant: 1,2,3 or 4. The school you work in will not be named nor will any personal/identifiable information be disclosed in the findings and written documents. Direct quotes from the interview may be used, however, confidentiality (use of fake names) will be upheld. The final article and all transcripts or notes taken will be made available to all participants upon request and upon completion of the study: approximately December 30<sup>th</sup> 2019 (see below to request copies of transcripts, notes, or documents).

If you have questions regarding the study, please feel free to contact myself, or my supervisor, Dr. Brenda Kalyn at the telephone numbers provided above or through my confidential email address.

This study has been approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board, University of Saskatchewan on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the Ethics Office toll free at 1-888-966-2084.

**Consent to Participate:**

I have read and understand the information above and I understand the contents of the Consent Form. Any questions I might have had have been answered.

I consent to voluntarily participating in this study understanding that my right to withdraw from the study will apply until June 2019. After that point your data will become part of the larger generation of theory and some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw the data.

I have received a copy of the Consent Form for my own records.

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I would like a copy of transcripts, notes, final research paper (please circle): YES / NO

## Appendix F

### Scripts

#### **Script for School-Based Administrators: Read to School Staff**

*Good afternoon,*

*In an effort to keep you informed and apprised of school and community business, I wish to inform you that one of our teachers has voluntarily agreed to participate in a study around early career teachers / teaching. The researcher will be in our school to speak with \_\_\_\_\_ a couple of times each week for the next two months. The researcher will also be observing in the classroom. You should know that several other participants will be taking part in the study in Saskatoon and the report generated and / or published for the purpose of the researcher's dissertation will not include any identifiable factors regarding the participant, the school, the community or students. Students will not be the focus of this study. The researcher will assign a pseudonym to the school and participant and all interviews will take place with \_\_\_\_\_ privately in the school. If you have any questions or comments or wish to voice concerns please do so privately to me as soon as possible. Thank you.*

#### **Judy's Introduction: Script Read to Students**

*Good morning;*

*Today I will be in the classroom to observe your teacher and the actions and context of the classroom environment. I am here to learn about teachers and their lives in the classroom, and I am looking at teachers who are new to the teaching profession. Your teacher has volunteered to allow me to visit your classroom today and on three other occasions over the next two months to observe your classroom life. Please know that your parents and the other staff in the school are aware of my presence in the classroom over the next couple of months. If you have any questions about me or my work please ask, you may direct questions to me or to your teacher. If you have concerns you may also voice those and they will be respected. During the time that I am here, I will not be specifically observing you as students, I will be focusing on the actions, skills, and choices of your teacher only. Your teacher has volunteered to participate in my study and I am very appreciative of his/her and your time, at any point should you feel uncomfortable with an observer in the room do not hesitate to let your teacher know and I can leave the room at any time.*

*Thank you.*

**Appendix G**

**Letter to Students and Families**

**Dear Parents / Guardians:**

As a classroom teacher, I have agreed to participate in a research case study this term around my teaching practices. For this study a student from the University of Saskatchewan will be present in my classroom for one half day a month, for the period of four months to observe practices and discuss the art of teaching and learning in a classroom setting. This research, and classroom observations, will take place in an effort to support the research of a PhD candidate at the University of Saskatchewan, Judy Jaunzems-Fernuk. Judy is also an employee of Saskatoon Public Schools and her work situates around her interests in supporting teaching and learning. This research has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan, Behavioural Ethics Department and by Saskatoon Public Schools.

During her time in the classroom, Judy will not be speaking to, recording, or interviewing students, though interactions may occur. The purpose of the observations will be to observe myself as the classroom teacher and my strategies that support that enhance learning. Students will be made aware of the researcher's presence before each day and her purpose in the classroom as an observer will also be shared. Judy will not interfere at all with the daily classroom activities on the day of her observation, nor with the learning of the students. At no point will students be asked to comment nor will student names, my name, or any classroom / school identifiers be used in any professional or published writings in regards to these observations. The study of teachers and how they practice is an essential element of teacher learning and this work aims to support the development of knowledge around teaching practices in our province to support teacher education and professional development. Should you have any questions regarding these observations and / or the research that I am partaking in this term, do not hesitate to contact myself or Judy (or her supervisor) directly as their contact information is also below.

This study has been approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board, University of Saskatchewan on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Any questions regarding your rights as parents or students in the classroom of a participant may be addressed to the Ethics Office: [ethics.office@usask.ca](mailto:ethics.office@usask.ca) (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free (888) 966-2975.

Sincerely; \_\_\_\_\_

**Research Supervisor:**  
Dr. Brenda Kalyn: (306) 966-7566  
Department of Curriculum Studies  
University of Saskatchewan  
[Brenda.kalyn@usask.ca](mailto:Brenda.kalyn@usask.ca)

**Graduate Student:**  
Judy Jaunzems-Fernuk:  
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University of Saskatchewan  
[judy.fernuk@usask.ca](mailto:judy.fernuk@usask.ca)

## **Appendix H**

### **Questions Guiding Interviews and Observations**

1. How do competent and / or thriving early career teachers construct pedagogical knowledge?
2. How do competent and / or thriving early career teachers foster positive, safe, well-managed learning environments?
3. What skills have competent and / or thriving teachers acquired, where have they acquired them, and how have they become adept at using them?
4. What decisions and plans do competent and / or thriving teachers make in order to support management, learning, and overall student safety, comfort, and success?
5. What qualities (behaviours, characteristics, or attributes) do competent and / or thriving teachers possess?
6. How and why are decisions made or applied in competent and / or thriving teachers' classrooms?

## Appendix I

### Final Interview Questions Guide

Questions to ask from initial observations, interviews, and transcriptions (initial analysis):

May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019

1. Demographical Information:
  - a. Age:
  - b. Major in School (area):
  - c. Year of Teaching:
  - d. Number of Schools:
  - e. Education / Training:
  - f. Role in School:
  - g. Number of Students:
  - h. Grade(s) Taught:
    - i. This year
    - ii. Previous
  - i. Previous Experience with teaching and kids:
2. Background:
  - a. what brought you to teaching?
3. What do you love about your job?
4. If you could change one thing about your B. Ed experience what would it be?
5. Do you feel like your voice is heard in your school?
  - a. Are you comfortable speaking up about concern or issues?
6. Do you contribute to your professional learning on an ongoing basis?
  - a. Do you pay for it?
  - b. Do you go to trainings, workshops, or complete courses on your own time?
7. What is the most challenging aspect of your role?
8. What have you learned formally about mental health and its impact in the classroom?
9. What have you learned formally in regards to classroom management skills or philosophies?
  - a. What is your management philosophy or go to?
10. Tell me about your internship:
11. What has helped shape who you are as an educator?
12. What aspects of your personality do you feel support you the most / least in this role?
13. How do you use technology in the classroom?
14. What is your favourite or 'go to' resources?
  - a. Any must have's others should know about?
15. Pedagogy is the method and practice of teaching...if you were to have a 'pedagogical creed' (value statement /belief statement) around teaching and learning what would it be?
16. Where do you see yourself in 5, 10 years?
17. What is the most important thing / skill you teach?
18. Do you have an educational role model?

## THRIVING EARLY CAREER TEACHERS

19. If you could design one course that all Education students had to take, what activities, theories, ideas, or resources would need to be on the syllabus?
20. What interests you about this work? What do you anticipate as you evolve in your role?
21. Opinions: free time, choice time, rewards, consequences, discipline?

**Appendix J**

**A 15-point Checklist of Criteria for Good Thematic Analysis  
(Reproduced from Braun & Clarke, 2006)**

1. Transcription: The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy';
2. Coding: Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process;
3. Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive;
4. All relevant extracts for each theme have been collated;
5. Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set;
6. Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive;
7. Analysis: Data have been analysed – interpreted, made sense of - rather than just paraphrased or described;
8. Analysis and data match each other – the extracts illustrate the analytic claims;
9. Analysis tells a convincing and well-organised story about the data and topic;
10. A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided;
11. Overall: Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly;
12. Written report: The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are clearly explicated;
13. There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done – i.e., described method and reported analysis are consistent;
14. The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis;
15. The researcher is positioned as active in the research process; themes do not just 'emerge'.