

**A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO  
THE IDENTITY MAKING OF TWO  
EARLY-CAREER TEACHERS:  
UNDERSTANDING THE PERSONAL IN  
PERSONAL PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE**

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By

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## **Dedication**

For teachers at the beginning of their careers—with love and respect.

## Abstract

This narrative inquiry began with queries into the identity-making experiences of two teachers, Anna and Penny, at the beginning of their careers. Through weekly research conversations over 2 years, they told stories of their experiences in school. Over time, it became clear that their personal experiences with their families outside school shaped who they were in their classrooms with children. Their professional identities—their stories to live by—began on personal knowledge landscapes and then were recomposed into professional knowledge landscapes.

They experienced tension when their familial stories of what it meant to be a teacher were interrupted or challenged. From the midst of teachers', children's, and families' lives together in schools, Anna and Penny worked to make sense of these tension-filled experiences. Travelling between each others' worlds was complex.

Their personal experiences helped them make sense of difficult situations in their classrooms and contributed to their teacher knowledge. Connelly and Clandinin refer to this form of teacher knowledge as “personal practical knowledge” (1988, p. 25). The research presented in this dissertation attends to the personal practical knowledge, the intellectual work, that Anna and Penny used as beginning teachers.

This research contributes to the larger practical and social aspects of beginning teachers. Stories of attrition and retention, struggle and survival, have shaped previous research literature as well as the professional practical landscape where beginning teachers work. Attending to ways beginning teachers make sense of these stories around them, and the stories of tension in their first classrooms, opens possibilities for teacher educators, administrators, policy makers,

colleagues, families, and students to create spaces for new stories to be told. In any new situation uncertainty will occur. This research acknowledges that tension is inherent in any new situation and emphasizes the possibility of sustaining beginning teachers in their stories of themselves as teachers in the midst of that tension. This inquiry makes openings for conversations about the importance of acknowledging familial and personal stories as part of what sustains a person at the beginning of a teaching career.

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## **Chapter One: Narrative Beginnings**

### **Awakening to Experiences as a Beginning Teacher, Again**

I came across an envelope of course evaluations the other day. It was thrown into a box full of old office supplies and academic journal articles. As I opened the envelope, painful stories flooded back into my memory. Seven years ago I packed up my books, closed the door to my office, and thought I was done teaching at the university for good. For 3 years my work as a sessional lecturer had been fulfilling as I journeyed alongside teacher candidates in their last semester before graduating from the College of Education. While I taught a night class at the university once a week, I also taught full time during the day in an elementary school as a Grade 5 teacher. Life in my classroom with children was a place of community where curiosity and playful approaches to learning led our meaning-making between each other and the subject matter into which we inquired. My university office was busy before and after class with students stopping by for conversations. I looked forward to classes and appreciated the relationships we were making and the ways those relationships shaped what happened each Tuesday evening in class. In my fourth year, everything changed. Class time with my university students was filled with tension each week. Middle-years cohorts I had worked with in the past were made up of people hoping to teach Grades 4 to 6. This particular cohort, while still technically a middle-years cohort, was more interested in Grade 8 and high school. Several dominant people in this group were not receptive to the activities that had been

engaging for students in previous classes. In previous terms, with other cohorts, I had read aloud a piece of children's literature at the beginning of each class. In the past, Shaun Tan's (2007) wordless picture book called *The Arrival* stimulated conversation about belonging as we imagined their lives as teachers in new schools where expectations may not be met. Enthusiasm had filled our conversations as they drew on their experiences with children during their practicums. With this last cohort, the majority sat silently as several dominant personalities talked noisily among themselves about other things unrelated to the story as I read each week. In spite of sensing that they were not engaged in the books at the beginning of each class, I continued to share books that I loved. In whole-class conversations, it seemed my experiences with children did not fit with how they imagined themselves to be in classrooms of high school students. I felt the students at the back were being disrespectful, and as the term went on, I worried that they were starting a snowball effect with the rest of the class. I was hurt further when I read their comments at the end of the term where they said I treated them like elementary school students when I read aloud books that were meant for children. Journaling, as part of the portfolios they created, was a point of anxiety for me when I asked each group to cocreate rubrics for self- and peer assessment, and class conversations about assessment became conversations about marks. Microteaching opportunities with each other and small-group discussion about the week's assigned reading were perceived as "not real teaching," and they did not find these experiences useful. They told me that in

their practicums in schools, the curriculum guide was a legal document rather than being cocreated alongside children as I suggested. Discussions related to social issues became places where individual students aimed to prove a right or a wrong answer, and my own knowledge of seeking diversity within community relationships collided with their experiences of teacher as expert. I knew something was not quite right relationally in this class but was not able to shift the tone of arrogance that dominated each week. However, no one articulated any complaints until the last day of classes when they filled out the feedback forms that would go to the head of the department. Indeed, that was part of the difficulty for me. I felt betrayed by their lack of communication with me when there were clearly individuals whose notions of good teaching were bumping up against how and what I was teaching.

I have vivid images of my students from this last class. I do not know who wrote the derogatory evaluations, but certain people from the class stayed in my memory. David<sup>1</sup> sat at the front of the class every week. He came to teaching later in his life. He had a 7-year-old son whom I met in the grocery store with him. In that coincidental meeting outside of class, David greeted me enthusiastically and talked about cross-country skiing with his son. After class each week, he stayed to talk about the readings and the paper he was working on. Yet each Tuesday evening during class, with his head down and eyes averted, he rarely spoke. Bev also kept her eyes low from her seat closest to the door.

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<sup>1</sup> All names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms.

Occasionally she would catch my eye before looking away. I wondered what she was thinking each time I looked at her. Was she feeling sorry for me? Was it dislike for me? Did I say something to offend her? Students at this university were grouped into sections who took their classes together, and she was part of a different cohort except for this Tuesday evening class. I worried she felt alone as I watched her reluctantly move into small-group conversations to discuss readings. Laurie had strong opinions based on her 10 years of experience with high school students as an educational assistant. In small-group discussions and presentations to the whole class, she was confident and spoke with a loud voice. Her own children were the ages of many students in the Tuesday evening class. One evening after class, she pulled me aside in the hallway and said I should tell the students at the back of the room to shut up when I was talking. I felt pressure to control the class, but could not find a way that fit with my relational way of curriculum making (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992). Eric sat at the back of the classroom, baseball cap turned backward on his head. Tipping back on his chair, he had his eyes on everyone in front of him and controlled conversations around him with smirks and cynicism. Ben and Roy sat on either side of him each class, laughing at his jokes and bantering back and forth. Olivia sat in front of them; she argued loudly with others at every opportunity. She told me frequently after class that she was in the top 10% of her cohort and expected leading marks as she competed for scholarships with others in the class.

In my memory of them, I knew only single stories (Adichie, 2009) of their complex lives. I felt they held a single story of me. I was a sessional lecturer and therefore not a real professor. I felt “less than” in their eyes. My response was to solve the problem, and I worked intellectually to make sense of the situation. As I tried to understand each student within the whole of the classroom dynamic, I looked back and saw how I perceived my students with single stories. In the same way they gave me the single story of a sessional lecturer who was less than their expectations, so too did I have expectations and single stories of them. Our stories of each other were incomplete. More than that, I gave myself the story that I was not cut out for teaching in a university. My story of myself was also incomplete. In my reflections, I wondered how our relational understandings of each other might have been different if we had recognized how we arrogantly perceived (Lugones, 1987) each other through these single stories. I also wondered about the arrogant perception and single story I held for myself.

I wanted to make space for multiple voices in the classroom, yet after each class I felt as though I had not done so. I wanted relationships with my students, but many of them did not. The story of teacher as expert ran strong in the dominant story they held of the profession, and it was one they wanted me to support. While I didn't tell this story of teacher as expert in my elementary school classroom, I found myself trying to tell the “cover story” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25) of expert in my university classroom. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) explained that teachers sometimes live and tell cover stories



when they move out of their classrooms into other places on the education landscape. Moving out of their classroom where they feel safe to live out their personal knowledge, they sometimes tell cover stories in which they portray themselves as experts, certain characters whose teacher stories fit within the acceptable range of the story of school. “Cover stories enable teachers whose teacher stories are marginalized by whatever the current story of school is to continue to practice and to sustain their teacher stories,” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25). Moving out of my elementary school classroom into the university classroom was a situation in which I told a cover story. I felt marginalized as the students shaped my story. I tried to portray myself with stories that fit within the acceptable range of stories being lived out in the university and in this particular department, yet it was not who I was.

Seven years after this experience, as I pulled the pages from the envelope and began reading their evaluations of my teaching, my heart pounded and tears came to my eyes. A secret memory buried deep in a box of old supplies came rushing out anew. Their comments hurt me.

I told myself the story that I was one who was good at making healthy relationships with other people, and when that story was fractured, I felt great tension. I told myself the story of being a competent and creative teacher. I told others and myself the story of living in a community where commitment to working through tension was assumed, and when this group of people did not reinforce that story, it was a catalyst moment for me. I felt shame for the words

they said about me in the envelope of evaluations. Without support from my department head, and without relationships with other sessional lecturers to try to make sense of my experience, it was enough to end my beginnings as a teacher at the university.

This experience led me to wonders about early-career teachers. I wanted to understand my own experience as a sessional lecturer, as a beginning-teacher educator, and how I might someday go back to teaching at a university. I wanted to be able to trust myself in a relational way with beginning teachers in a classroom again.

**Personal justification: Autobiographical beginnings.**

I began this dissertation with an autobiographical account, a narrative beginning—the story of my experience as a sessional lecturer in the College of Education—to explain my own life experiences and tensions that brought me to this research. I justified my research project in the context of my “own life experiences, tensions, and personal inquiry puzzles” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 36). The context of my own life experience was the first place that questions about beginning teachers arose. Attending to my experience as a sessional lecturer, as well as other stories from my continuity of experience as a teacher, shaped the ways I entered into relationship with participants in this research. My inquiry began with my experience as a beginning sessional lecturer trying to connect with a class who resisted my efforts to create narratives of learning that were different from dominant university learning. However, although I was trying to create

educative spaces for students, I was still mandating what it was they needed to learn. I was prescribing that they be relational with others and me. These experiences with a class of beginning teachers who resisted my efforts to create narratives of learning counter to what they knew university learning to be provided me with a personal justification for entering into the work of this narrative inquiry. As Clandinin (2013) stated:

First, we must inquire into who we see ourselves as being and becoming, within the inquiry. Second, without an understanding of what brings us to our research puzzles, we run the risk of entering into relationships without an understanding of what brings each of us to our research puzzles, we run the risk of entering into relationships without a sense of what stories we are living and telling in the research relationships. Third, without an understanding of who we are in the inquiry, we are not awake to the ways we attend to the experiences of research participants. (p. 36)

In addition to providing a catalyst for my wonders about beginning teachers, these experiences created tensions that have lingered with me throughout this inquiry. These tensions became meaningful places for me to inquire into in this research because they caused me to think more deeply about who I am as a teacher. Along with the previous story, I recalled stories of school and home. As I wrote stories of who I was in different contexts, I became aware of myself as one who was used to travelling between home and other worlds, and it was in the space between that I exercised future dreams into a professional

identity. Writing this dissertation made a space between the difficult story as a sessional lecturer who left and my future dreams to teach again in a university.

Narrative beginnings are autobiographical accounts from personal and professional life experience (Clandinin, 2013). The autobiographical writing I did first shaped how I saw the research and helped me imagine who I could be alongside my research participants Anna and Penny. I shared the narrative beginning I chose for this work to help readers understand the research puzzles and the findings of this research into beginning teachers' experiences. It is a story that I, as a narrative inquirer, wrote in order to attend to my own experiences. This narrative beginning helped me understand who I was in this research inquiry.

### **Coming to teaching from a multiplicity of stories.**

When I first began thinking about what it meant to be a beginning teacher, I found memories that were both full of passion and joy and, like the story at the beginning of this dissertation, that were painful. Stories of what I knew first tumbled forward. I remembered stories of where I came from, a family farm on the prairies of western Canada, with professional experiences in Africa and India. Complex stories of my first years as a teacher included stories from my mother's classroom, stories from Zimbabwe, and tension-filled stories of work as a sessional lecturer. These stories lingered with me long after I had lived the experiences. Some of my stories—those fraught with uncertainty, marginalization, and fear—were mirrored in the research literature of surviving the “profession that eats its young” (Anhorn, 2008, p. 1). Even with stories that

were tension filled for me, I also told countless stories of joy as a teacher in classrooms with children in elementary schools and beginning teachers in university classrooms. I remembered stories of where I came from, stories that focused on what I had learned from watching my mother teach in the small farming community in which we lived. I remembered stories from the faraway places where I travelled to teach as a young adult.

After my first year of doctoral studies, I went to the University of Alberta's Centre for Research and Teacher Education. Here I began long-lasting relationships with other narrative inquirers. Our conversations in small works-in-progress groups included reading our narrative beginnings and talking about moments of vulnerability. I returned to these relationships and others in the narrative-inquiry community via e-mail, Skype, and intentional gatherings at conferences over 6 years of studies. I was also part of works in progress groups at my home university. As I first told my story as a sessional lecturer within my response community, I felt shame. Yet each time I told it, people identified with the experience and shared stories of their own experiences of similar situations. Each time I told it, I could understand the experience a little more. Eventually, through unpacking my many stories, I recognized the multiplicity of stories in my life. I could see that I was not limited to one single story as my students in that infamous class seemed to imagine, as I imagined about them, or as I imagined for myself. Gradually, my attention turned from surviving tension-filled experiences

to understanding how these saving stories (King, 2003)<sup>2</sup> and this world travelling (Lugones, 1987)<sup>3</sup> had shaped my experience. As I aligned myself with different stories, my understanding of what it meant to be a beginning teacher also shifted.

The process of naming my research puzzle grew from my shifting understanding of my story. These shifted narrative beginnings shaped my research puzzles as I worked to identify the concepts and terms for my inquiry.

### **The research puzzle.**

My research puzzle began as a general inquiry into the experiences of beginning teachers. At a time where the dominant story for beginning teachers is of many people who leave teaching (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006) during their first 4 years, I wondered about shifting stories for teachers at the beginning of their careers. Over time, the research focused more specifically on understanding identity at the beginning of a career. Through moments of curriculum making<sup>4</sup> in their classrooms, I learned that identity at the beginning of a career is a process of shifts and change. The inquiry explored how two teachers dealt with tensions on the professional knowledge landscape (Clandinin &

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas King (2003) refers to “saving stories” as the stories we tell to ourselves and to each other. They are the stories that keep us alive in the midst of life challenges. They are the stories that make us laugh and the stories that make us cry. They are the stories that help us make sense of the world.

<sup>3</sup> Maria Lugones (1987) explains a world as a place that is possible and “inhabited by some flesh and blood people” (p. 87). It is not an imagined utopia. She says that we are different in different worlds and remember these experiences as we move between worlds or occupy multiple worlds at the same time.

<sup>4</sup> Curriculum making is about relationships in a classroom. It is “children’s and teachers’ lives together in schools and classrooms . . . [in which] the teacher is seen as an integral part of the curricular process . . . [where] teacher, learner, subject matter and milieu are in dynamic interaction” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 392).

Connelly, 1995). As they employed personal practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) to understand challenging situations, their identity, and what they thought it meant to be a teacher, shifted. As I deepened my understanding of who preservice and beginning teachers were, possibilities for new ways of living in their worlds came to light. I attended to familial stories and professional stories, which shaped their knowledge of what it meant to be a teacher. Stories and puzzles about how they made sense of uncertainties and tensions were central. These stories, situated in and triggered by experience in schools, became the research focus of this work. The research presented in this dissertation attends to the curriculum making of two beginning teachers, founded on their identity making and personal practical knowledge, within an ontology of experience (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

### **Stories to live by.**

“Stories to live by” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) is the narrative phrase used to refer to identity. Rather than thinking of an identity as a fixed entity, narrative inquirers understand people to live by stories they compose over time based on their experiences. I composed my professional life (Bateson, 1990) according to the stories I had experienced with what it means to be a teacher. Through my mother’s classroom and experiences in my own classroom, I knew myself to be a competent and creative teacher who cocomposed classroom community with children. I was a teacher who lived in relation to others around me. Through limited experiences of how to be a teacher educator, I had relied on

what I knew outside the university classroom. In my elementary school classrooms I was one who took risks and tried new things easily with children. I took who I was in other classrooms and other places in my personal life into who I was in my university classroom. While I had taught several classes at the university, the story that stayed with me was the one of perceived failure. This experience shaped my story to live by. I knew stories of failure as stories of embarrassment and as stories of being less than. I remembered stories of other professors whom students could not connect with and whose classes lacked meaning. This was not a story I wanted to tell with my life. The stories I told and lived were not the same as the stories individuals in my university told. They had many different plotlines in their stories of what it meant to be a teacher. The stories I lived in my elementary school and in my personal life shaped who I was in the university classroom. Heilbrun (1988) suggests that stories are what shape us.

What matters is that lives do not serve as models: only stories do that. And it is a hard thing to make up stories to live by. We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. We live our lives through texts. They may be read, or chanted, or experienced electronically, or come to us, like the murmurings of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand. Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all: they are what we must use to make new fictions. (Heilbrun, 1988, p. 37)



Stories of teachers who inspired me were strong in my identity. Stories of creative teachers were my models. When I perceived myself in the story of failure, it did not fit the models I had saved as stories to live by as a teacher.

Because of my own experiences in relation to a narrative understanding of identity, I attended to the stories that the two teachers in this inquiry told me—stories about their families and stories about the institutions of school and teacher education—and I saw them shape their new narratives as teachers from stories in their current professional contexts.

Identity in a narrative sense is a plot line, or many plot lines, that a person lives out. Greene (1995) furthered my understanding of the narrative qualities of experience when she wrote that neither she nor her narrative could have a single strand. “I stand at the crossing point of too many social and cultural forces; and, in any case, I am forever on . . . [my] way. My identity has to be perceived as multiple” (p. 1). Although Anna’s and Penny’s professional experiences were situated in particular schools and particular geographical places with social and cultural forces, they composed the professional stories to live out of what they had already experienced. Stories to live by have plot lines with a history, which take shape as life unfolds in the present and shape future experiences. Stories to live by shift and change depending on the context or life situation in which one finds him- or herself.

### **Teacher knowledge.**

Personal and professional experience formed my embodied knowledge of what it meant to be a teacher. I relied on this knowledge in my work with teacher candidates at the university, and it shaped my practice with children in classrooms. My “teacher knowledge” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 59) was and is shaped by experience.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999b) have studied teacher knowledge since the 1970s. Based on the work of Dewey (1938), Schwab (1973), Polanyi (1958), and others, they understand teachers as knowers. Based on this understanding, they spoke about personal practical knowledge, which they described as:

A term designed to capture the idea of experience in a way that allows us to talk about teachers as knowledgeable and knowing persons. Personal practical knowledge is in the teacher’s past experience, in the teacher’s present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions. Personal practical knowledge is found in the teacher’s practice. It is, for any teacher, a particular way of reconstructing the past and the intention of the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 25)

Connelly and Clandinin’s (1988) concept of personal practical knowledge is key to the inquiries undertaken in this dissertation.

As this inquiry progressed, I became increasingly aware of teacher knowledge and how experiences were situated in a narrative life history. In terms

of my own storied life composition, these stories were both personally and professionally situated. Who I was as a person outside school was also who I was in my professional life. The experiences I had in my personal life influenced the choices I made as a professional for and with children and adults in my classrooms. I wondered if this was so for the participants in this research. I turned to Clandinin and Connelly (1995) to frame a foundation to explore the complexities of understanding how my participants' teacher knowledge may have been formed and expressed on both personal and professional landscapes. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) developed the concepts of personal practical knowledge and a professional knowledge landscape, both narrative terms, as a way to understand teacher knowledge.

#### **Professional knowledge landscape.**

Constructing a view of landscape as narratively constructed with moral, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions, Clandinin and Connelly (1995) also suggested that teachers lived in in-classroom and out-of-classroom places. They described the out-of-classroom place as a place where knowledge *for* teachers was funnelled into a school system to alter children's and teachers' classroom lives. Prescriptions and other people's views of what is best for children are imposed from out-of-classroom places. They described this theory-driven view in the following way:

Researchers, policy makers, senior administrators and others, using various implementation strategies, push research findings, policy

statements, plans, improvement schemes and so on down what we call the conduit into this out-of-classroom place on the professional knowledge landscape. (p. 5)

The professional knowledge landscape metaphor assists in understanding the complexities of schools. Over time, in relation to others on the landscape, qualities of schools show the differences between in-classroom and out-of-classroom places. As I moved between these two places in my own experiences and in the narratives of experience of Anna and Penny, I experienced tensions. The personal practical knowledge I had gained as an elementary school teacher did not seamlessly transfer into work with adults on a university campus. The professional knowledge landscape had shifted for me. Each Tuesday evening became a place where what and who I was became imposed knowledge *for* me. The teacher candidates had expectations of who I should be in this space and role. Their views of teacher as expert shaped the curriculum making in our university classroom. Their expectations bumped against what I had experienced and learned in personal and professional places where learning happened in community. As these different stories met on the professional knowledge landscape, conflicting and competing stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) emerged. Conflicting stories are stories that collide with the dominant stories of school and cannot be sustained. My story of healthy relationships with my students collided with the dominant story of university being a place of scholarly competition. Competing stories live in dynamic but positive tension with the

dominant stories of school. Reading children's literature to adults as a means to open discussions was a story that I sustained in the midst of the tension I felt from my students. Understanding the professional knowledge landscape in these narrative ways helped me to inquire into the experiences of the two beginning teachers.

Schools and universities are places where diverse personal experiences from individual lives intersect. Human experiences of what it means to be a teacher begin in personal experience on personal knowledge landscapes and go along with people into their lives as teachers on professional knowledge landscapes. Schools and universities are places where people interact socially from the midst of their individual experiences, as they explore the practice of teaching.

### **How to Read this Dissertation**

#### **Format.**

This dissertation includes a series of manuscripts for publication. While the dissertation as a whole is a narrative inquiry into the identity of two beginning teachers named Anna and Penny, there are four chapters that are meant to be read as stand alone papers. Chapter one introduces the reader to the personal experience that brought me to wanting to understand teachers at the beginning of their careers. Chapter two explains the importance of understanding beginning teacher identity in the context of current social issues and classroom practices. Chapter three outlines narrative inquiry as the methodology I used to inquire into

Anna and Penny's experience. Chapters four, five, six, and seven are the stand alone manuscripts that have been, or will be, submitted for publication with peer reviewed education journals. Chapter eight is a summary of my findings. This format positions me on the professional landscape as a published author, which is beneficial at the beginning of an academic career.

### **Participants.**

Anna and Penny are pseudonyms for the two participants in this research. They were both undergraduate students of my advisor, Dr. Shaun Murphy. Through classes at the university and practical experiences in their internships, he came to know them as engaged students. Dr. Murphy spoke with Anna and Penny about being part of a research project with me. They were interested. After consent forms were signed and the university's ethical review board approved the project, we began weekly research conversations which lasted 2 years. This dissertation is an inquiry into the stories they told in those conversations. After graduating with a teaching certificate, Anna was hired into a permanent contract teaching Grade 4. Penny worked as a substitute teacher. After 2 years of subbing, Penny was employed in a Grade 2 classroom and indicated that she needed to be finished with this research so that she could concentrate on her classroom. I finished the manuscript about her that I was working on at the time and then did not write other chapters about her experience. Without the ability to member check with her as I wrote final research texts, I did not feel confident to move forward. I instead focused the other chapters on Anna.

This is why there is one chapter about Penny and three chapters about Anna.

Throughout the dissertation the reader may notice a change in Anna's voice and the language she uses. Midway into her third year of teaching she began graduate work with Dr. Murphy and began reading narrative inquiries. She took up the language of what she was hearing and learning.

### **What I Am Trying to Understand**

There was pain in my narrative beginnings as a teacher educator. Even though I left the university I still wondered if it was something I might like to do. As a graduate student, I read literature about beginning teachers. The story of struggle to survive and daunting attrition rates dominated. I wasn't the only good teacher leaving the classroom. I wanted to tell a different story for myself and I wanted to shift the story we tell of beginning teachers. This dissertation explores questions of how to shift the stories that allow us to barely survive or alternatively, leave the profession.

## **Chapter Two: Situating the Research**

### **Social and Practical Justifications**

Narrative inquiry is committed to research situated in human experience. Because of this commitment to experience, my text grew from asking questions that began with personal justification, to questions of practical and social justification. In the following chapter, I explain how practical and social justifications clarify research purpose. Questions of “So What?” and “Who cares?” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 35) are important in the context of a research inquiry.

#### **Practical justification.**

I attend to practical justification by “considering the possibility of shifting, or changing, practice” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 36). Practical justification “brings us close to the experiences of others and the social contexts in which they are positioned” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 174). Through practical justification, I inquired into practices related to beginning teachers and considered how practices might be changed in relation to beginning teachers. I became awake to the multiplicity of personal stories that beginning teachers take to their first teaching positions and the importance of making space for them to reflect on their stories to live by that were/are created in their homes and families.

Current research literature about beginning teachers draws attention to what is lacking or deficient in a beginning teacher’s practice. The mainstream education landscape focuses on beginning teacher experience as a series of problems (Veenman, 1984). Gold (1984), Maslach (1976), and Schlichte, Yssel,



and Merbler (2005) report “burnout” to be the primary reason for teachers leaving the profession. Feeling “overwhelmed, hectic, isolated, beaten down, unsupported, scared, humiliated, afraid, stressed, and drowning” (Anhorn, 2008, p. 15) and other challenges are said to contribute to resulting high rates of teacher attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Guarino et al., 2006; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Existing research draws attention to a plotline of survival, riddled with the drama of problems and failures in their practice. Mainstream practices for those supporting beginning teachers are through mentorship and induction into a new role (Feiman-Nemser, 2003). Recommendations for successful induction and mentoring purport various means of supervision (Hellston, Prytula, Ebanks, & Lai, 2009; Prytula, Makahonuk, Syrota, & Pesenti, 2009; Ralph, 2002). Through supervised induction into a predetermined role, educational institutions reduce a complex experience into a survival story where the characters’ only options are to “sink or swim” (Strawn, Fox, & Duck, 2008).

This research shifts the story about beginning teachers. Early-career teachers want to do more than merely survive the first 5 years. Instead of telling stories of beginning teachers struggling to survive on the education landscape while expert others supervise and induct them into the profession, with this research I inquire into the experience of how beginning teachers shape an identity through making sense and making choices along the path of creating professional stories. Instead of pathologizing the beginning teacher and viewing tension as the

precursor to leaving the profession, I consider the beginning teacher as a “curriculum maker” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 392)<sup>5</sup> engaged in a “course of life” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 393)<sup>6</sup> with children in schools.

The practical justification of this inquiry was shaped by a desire to understand more deeply and continuously the experiences of beginning teachers in relation to their families and others in and out of school and university settings. In light of this attention to the lives of beginning teachers, the focus shifted from induction and supervision to retain teachers to focus on inquiring into the multiple personal and familial stories they bring to teaching and teacher education that could sustain them (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2011).

### **Social justification.**

“Social justification connects the personal justification with a public, social sense of significance” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 121). It positions the work “relative to other streams of thought, research programs, and ideologies” (p. 136). Social justification in this type of research finds connection points in both theoretical significance and future social action. I explored social practices and stories told about beginning teachers in the research literature as I considered issues of social implications. Clandinin and Caine (2013) contended, “As narrative inquirers we share borderland spaces with social scientists, who come

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<sup>5</sup> “Curriculum might be viewed as an account of teachers’ and children’s lives together in schools and classrooms . . . [In this view of curriculum making] the teacher is seen as an integral part of the curricular process . . . in which teachers, learners, subject matter, and milieu are in dynamic interaction” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 145).

<sup>6</sup> Life experience is central in the negotiation of curriculum making as “the vision of curriculum as a course of life” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 393).

from a constructivist or critical social science perspective, spaces that call forth a deeper understanding on how social contexts shape experiences” (p. 174). Social justification in this research pays attention to the current discourse around beginning teachers in which “attrition is high for young teachers” (Guarino et al., 2006, p. 10). The focus on problems and detriments in the literature is in response to retaining teachers in schools. My inquiry, along with other narrative inquirers (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2011; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012), shifts attention from problems and detriments to focus on the experiences that teachers bring with them at the beginning of their careers to advance conversations of sustaining teachers at the beginning of their careers. Long et al. (2012) suggested:

When the problem of how to retain and mentor beginning teachers for their “role” in schools is reframed as a matter of sustaining beginning teachers to develop newly emerging identities as people who teach children, questions around the support that beginning teachers value, biographical questions around teaching intentions, and questions around continuity of experience as beginning teachers transition from educational institutions to school landscapes become critical. (p. 22)

Within the discourse around teacher attrition, sustaining beginning teachers rather than merely retaining them is an emerging discussion (Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010; Estolla, 2003; Leitch, 2010; Nelson, Antayá-Moore, Badley, & Coleman, 2010; Nieto, 2003; Rice & Pinnegar, 2010; Schaefer, 2012; Schaefer & Clandinin, 2011; Schaefer et al., 2012; Young

et al., 2010). A conversation about sustaining rather than retaining opens possibilities for exploring questions of how a beginning teacher's identity shifts and changes in the first 4 years of teaching. Viewing the identity of a beginning teacher as a shifting identity rather than deferring to models of induction into a fixed role and identity is the focus of this inquiry into sustaining teachers on the professional knowledge landscape.

***Theoretical connection points.***

The points of connection to theoretical discourse situated in the larger social significance of the beginning teachers' experiences came for me through reading the work of John Dewey; Clandinin and Connelly; Clandinin, Murphy and Huber; Thomas King; Maxine Greene; Mary Catherine Bateson; Caroline Heilbrun; and Maria Lugones. These authors inspired me and formed the foundation for connecting theory to the experiences that Anna and Penny shared as beginning teachers composing their identities.

*John Dewey.*

Dewey's (1938) philosophy of experience shaped my understanding throughout the inquiry. His ideas about continuity of experience and the ways growth happens were foundational to how I understood the stories that Anna and Penny told. As beginning teachers, in light of Dewey's philosophy, they shaped their professional identities in the context of past, present, and future experiences. Their experiences were situated in a continuity of experience. They lived in relation to social interactions around them in particular places that shaped who

they were and who they were becoming as teachers. According to Dewey (1938), the criteria of experience for education are continuity, situation, and interaction. It is within this theory of experience that I inquired into the stories that Anna and Penny told me.

New situations, some tension filled, contributed to the continuum of experiences—which shaped expectations and perceptions—with which Anna and Penny came to teaching. When an experience was felt as an interruption to their lives, the particular interaction was either an “educative” or “mis-educative” (Dewey, 1938) experience. An interruption that was educative invited growth in perception and experience. Educative experiences sometimes invited shifts and change, sometimes leading to affirmations and claiming of a story that shaped who they were. Although tension is felt in both educative and mis-educative experiences, experiences that were considered educative sustained each teacher as whole people in different ways on both their personal and professional knowledge landscapes. Mis-educative experiences made them feel anxious and overwhelmed in a struggle for survival—experiences that froze their knowledge of what it means to be a teacher within faceless institutional stories. In these moments they felt there was nowhere for them to move forward as the individuals they were. In mis-educative experiences, they neither claimed nor shifted their knowledge. In these moments their personal and professional lives became frozen apart. Dewey’s ideas shaped my hopes for being alongside beginning teachers in ways that are educative rather than mis-educative. Sustaining beginning teachers in

their identity as whole people who are cocreators of curriculum with children in schools is a shift away from surviving in a sink or swim induction model where their role as teacher is disconnected from the stories they live in other places of their lives.

*Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin.*

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) shifted my focus from understanding beginning teacher stories with a focus on survival to an understanding of their experiences as shaping a professional identity. Instead of perpetuating models of mentorship, supervision, and induction (Hellston et al., 2009; Long et al., 2012; Veenman, 1984), my attention turned to understanding the life of a beginning teacher from the midst of their lives as a whole.

Based on Joseph Schwab's (1973) ideas of curriculum common places, which he identified as teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu, Connelly and Clandinin (1988) established an approach to curriculum to acknowledge the commonplaces as a whole. Their work in 1992 extended the concept of the four commonplaces into personal practical knowledge in which a teacher was not a consumer of curriculum materials, but rather a maker of curriculum and an integral part of it alongside children. They suggested that curriculum making was a curricular process in which teacher, learners, subject matter, and milieu were in dynamic interaction in a vision of curriculum as a "course of life" (pp. 392–393). This concept of curriculum making was developed further as Clandinin et al. (2006) came to understand curriculum in schools as a "curriculum of lives" (p.

12), as multiple plotlines where each life interacted. Within classrooms, teachers and students come together from their own previous experiences of what it means to learn and what it means to be part of a classroom in a school, with each individual bringing particular interests in particular subject matters. Each individual has learned to interact with people and places in diverse ways. Teachers and students come into classrooms with stories to live by that shape who they are in their lives inside and outside of school. Clandinin et al. (2006) wrote, “We attended to multiple plotlines within each life, plotlines of child as learner, as learner of subject matter, as learner of his/her life, of his/her stories to live by” (p. 13). The attention they gave to students and teachers in classrooms invited me to attend to teachers at the beginning of their careers in a similar way. What does it mean to attend to multiple plotlines in beginning teachers’ lives? How do we pay attention to beginning teachers as learners in schools—as learners of subject matter, which could include the skills of organizing a classroom, but also as learners of their own lives? How can schools be places for beginning teachers to continue to be learners in the context of their stories to live by that shape who they are in classrooms?

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) explored teacher knowledge in classrooms. “Personal practical knowledge” (p. 59) became a term they used to describe teacher knowledge. They described teachers as holders of an embodied knowledge that is part of how they experience and understand educational situations. They wrote that personal practical knowledge is a moral, affective,

and aesthetic way to know what comes from a person's past, present, and future experiences. Practical knowledge that teachers use in their classrooms is shaped as much by experiences that are imagined and hoped for as they are shaped by what was learned in the past or experienced in the present. In this narrative inquiry, I attended to Anna's and Penny's personal practical knowledge as they interacted within a curriculum of lives, as each person in the interaction came with their individual past, present, and future experiences.

At the beginning of our research conversations, Anna and Penny spoke about curriculum as the imposed legal document on the shelf. They referred to it for planning purposes throughout the school year. They understood it to be written by professional curriculum writers in the Ministry of Education who passed the document on to school boards for administrators to supervise and teachers to enact. They spoke about it with feelings of anxiety and continuously unfulfilled expectations. At the same time, they lived and told stories in which they described their practices of negotiated learning with children. These experiences of negotiated learning from the midst of children, subject matter, and the places where they met in schools are the focal point for this inquiry.

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) also shaped my approach to the research puzzle with their conception of narrative inquiry as research method and methodology for studying experience in relational ways. They wrote:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current



idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (p. 479)

The foundation of this research is this view of experience, which Connelly and Clandinin developed based on Dewey's (1938) philosophy. They developed a narrative view of experience that attends to the idea that people cannot be understood only as individuals but need to be understood in relation to their social contexts, the places where their experiences occur, and that experiences grow out of other experiences and lead to further experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Anna and Penny endeavoured to interpret experiences that lead to further experience by sustaining the narrative coherence (Carr, 1986) of their lives as beginning teachers. They came to teaching from the midst of plotlines that were formed during their childhood, elementary school, secondary school, and postsecondary experiences, as well as plotlines of school and learning that their families shaped. These beliefs and images became their lens for their new experiences as beginning teachers, and possibly created a perception that they "knew more about teaching than they actually did" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1016), which sometimes became barriers to the growth of new ideas for practice.

When a taken-for-granted plotline was interrupted, it was rare that Anna and Penny quietly accepted the shift. At these points of interrupted plotlines, they wrestled to find a way to maintain their plotline or to try to understand the shift.

*Understanding tension: Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, and Murray Orr.*

Anna and Penny told stories about their professional experiences that were shaped over time by their experiences outside school. Making sense of situations in school was mediated through their stories to live by in conjunction with stories from outside school. They shaped their professional stories to live by in the context of their personal stories to live by. When situations of tension arose in their lives, it was often due to clashes between their personal stories to live by and dominant institutional narratives. When there was tension, both Anna and Penny perceived the situations as problems. They both felt shame in situations of tension, as I did in my experiences as a sessional lecturer. As I engaged in this research project and made theoretical connections, Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, and Murray Orr (2009) were significant in shifting my view of tension—an important change in light of the amount of tension beginning teachers experience in the first 4 years of their careers. Uncertainty and tension are to be expected in all beginnings, yet the institution of school views tension as a problem to be smoothed over. Feelings of survival and stories of attrition are about avoiding tension at all costs. Rather than approaching tension as a negative valence or as something to be smoothed over, I practiced an approach to tension as central to the research process. Anna and Penny expressed stories that held tension for

them. Instead of responding with a desire to smooth over the problem, my perspective shifted to a practice of listening attentively. Tension alerted me to be awake to what was going on in the experience. Tensions that happen as they negotiated curriculum were viewed as part of the experience rather than something to be avoided. “Tension between people, events or things, are a way of creating a between space which can exist in educative ways” (Clandinin et al., 2009, p. 2). Tension opened possibilities for my understanding of the complexities and multiple stories in a situation. Viewing tension in an educative (Dewey, 1938) way invites growth, while tension that is avoided at all costs has the potential to be mis-educative. Dewey (1938) wrote, “Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience” (p. 25). Aoki (2005) also wrote about how teachers live in “tensionality” (p. 161) between the mandated or planned curriculum and the lived curriculum that happens in classrooms. Furthering the view of living in tensionality, Clandinin, Murphy, and Huber (2011) began to explore the multiple tensionalities for teachers, children, and families in curriculum making. Their conceptual understanding of “familial curriculum making” (p. 27) opened the exploration of how Anna’s and Penny’s familial curriculum making shaped their experiences of teaching in classrooms with children. I wondered how their personal experiences from the midst of familial stories shaped their negotiation of multiple intersecting lives.

*Thomas King.*

Thomas King (2003) furthered my understanding of stories in people's lives in relation to social justification. His book *The Truth About Stories* inspired questions of what we do with stories, why stories matter, and what significance they hold in making meaning within a community. Regarding what we do with stories, he wrote, "Once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world. So you have to be careful with the stories that you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told" (p. 10).

Narrative inquiry demands that we watch out for the stories that participants tell. Once a story is told, it cannot be called back; it is the researcher's responsibility to retell the story in a way that leads to educative futures.

According to King (2003), stories matter a great deal. He referred to "saving stories" (p. 119) as the stories people tell to their friends, sometimes to strangers, because they make them laugh and because they are a particular kind of story. Saving stories are the stories that keep a person alive. He talks about stories as wondrous and dangerous things and that "the truth about stories is that's all we are" (p. 2). King's words cause me to pay attention to the stories that Anna and Penny told of who they are and how the stories around them shaped them in community. His words remind me to care for the stories that I am told.

*Maxine Greene.*

Maxine Green's (1995) work was a relevant theoretical connection point in relation to social justification. Her idea of *seeing big* positioned the individual participants, Anna and Penny, as the focus of the research. Their particular experiences of everyday interaction were the focal point rather than the general trends and tendencies toward attrition. Greene wrote:

To see things or people small, one chooses to see from a detached point of view, to watch behaviours from the perspective of a system, to be concerned with trends and tendencies rather than the intentionality and concreteness of everyday life. To see things or people big, one must resist viewing other human beings as mere objects or chess pieces and view them in their integrity and particularity instead. One must see from the point of view of the participant in the midst of what is happening if one is to be privy to the plans people make, the initiatives they take, the uncertainties they face. When applied to schooling, the vision that sees things big brings us in close contact with details and particularities that cannot be reduced to statistics or even to the measurable. (p. 10)

Although the lens of seeing big was where the focus remained, I situated my narrative inquiry within an institutional context where Anna and Penny were seen in small ways. Policy makers and the education community viewed Anna and Penny as novices to be inducted into a story of survival or attrition. Because this dominant institutional story of induction into surviving the beginning of their

careers detached them from their personal stories to live by, it became important for me to consider their individual past, present, and imagined future experiences as the place to begin.

Greene (1995) also set the stage for questions of being and becoming. She pointed toward becoming as “in process of creating a self, an identity” (p. 20) and referred to being who we are not yet. While the dominant lens saw beginning teachers as “not yet,” Anna and Penny frequently referred to themselves as teachers. Their identity was rooted in stories of being a teacher rather than stories of becoming a teacher.

*Mary Catherine Bateson.*

In her book *Composing a Life*, which attended to the complex lives of five women, Bateson (1990) suggested that life is a creative process of improvising and composing, a fluid movement of interdependent adaptation rather than one path to a goal. It is about combining “familiar and unfamiliar components in response to new situations, following an underlying grammar and evolving aesthetic” (p. 3). In light of technological advancements, global connectedness, diversity in classrooms, and the influences of these factors on educational practices, perhaps it is no longer possible to follow a single path of mandated outcomes of previous generations. Her work reminds me to explore what the *familiar and unfamiliar* were for Anna and Penny as they composed professional lives in relation to their personal lives. She reminds us that “we live with strangers . . . [even with] those we love most, with whom we share a shelter, a table, a bed”

(Bateson, 2000, p. 3). She reminds us how parents, children, partners, siblings, and friends repeatedly surprise us, revealing strangeness hidden in the familiar. Bateson says there is “familiarity hidden in the strange. We can look with curiosity and respect at the faces of men and women we have never met” (p. 3). The beginning of a career offers a chance to examine the familiar in the midst of the new. As Anna and Penny shifted into their new roles as teachers, they recognized the unfamiliar within a plotline of school that they knew as children. They looked backward and forward at the same time as they improvised their new identities as teachers. Their lives were “somewhat like works of art, partly planned and partly improvised” (Bateson, 2010, p. 24). They composed their lives over time in both their familiar and unfamiliar situations, improvising in new contexts while weaving threads from what they knew in their personal lives and connecting the whole of their stories to live by. Entering new careers as teachers, Anna and Penny were composing a further life based on “active wisdom” (p. 243) in which one brings reflection to action. Bateson referred to wisdom as “not simply an accumulation of information or experiences; it is the fruit of continuing reflection on encounters over time, a skill at drawing connections and finding similarities, looking for underlying patterns” (p. 234). As Anna and Penny reflected on who they were in their personal lives and patterns over time as they transferred what was valued in past experience, they were also sometimes constrained by those patterns. The challenge for both Anna and Penny was to “go toward the future with a plan [they were] willing to let go of” (p. 209).

*Carolyn Heilbrun.*

Carolyn Heilbrun's (1999) work opened space for thinking about beginning teachers as being in a condition of liminality—of being in the midst of a threshold experience. She wrote:

The word 'limen' means 'threshold,' and to be in a state of liminality is to be poised upon uncertain ground, to be leaving one condition or country or self and entering upon another. But the salient sign of liminality is its unsteadiness, its lack of clarity about exactly where one belongs and what one should be doing, or wants to be doing. (p. 3)

Beginning teachers are poised upon uncertain ground as they negotiate new places and relationships in schools. They leave the world of school as students and enter the same landscape as teachers. Experiences of wondering where to sit in the staffroom or arranging classroom desks in rows to fit in with colleagues around them were unsteady situations for Anna and Penny. They found themselves off-centre—"betwixt and between, neither altogether here nor there, not one kind of person or another, not this, not that" (p. 8). It was a time of figuring out what they wanted to be doing within the mandates and expectations of a new career while bringing with them years of knowing school as a student themselves. On one hand, they were trying to fit as gracefully as possible into the approved categories of school: appropriately creative, appropriately managerial, appropriately collegial, and appropriately successful. In another way, they embraced the threshold and abandoned the appropriate as they negotiated



curriculum making with children in classrooms and followed their own personal practical knowledge.

The experience of a beginning teacher is similar to being a foreigner in another culture. I understood the feeling of being torn between two cultures as a foreigner after my time teaching in Zimbabwe. I had roots over generations in Canada, and at the same time, I missed Africa. I could never really be at home, master the language, or understand the customs of Mtshabezi; yet when I was in Canada I longed for the veld and the people I had come to know in that place. Heilbrun (1999) referred to Cathy Davidson and her experience in Japan as an American foreigner where she experienced many a liminal state. The way she described wanting to fit in and at the same time knowing there would be times she would fail resonated with my own experiences in Zimbabwe and what I heard Anna and Penny say about their experiences as beginning teachers. Embarrassing or painful moments, misunderstandings, conflicts, confusion, intensity, novelty, and surprise are part of the experience of being a foreigner.

Questions of social justification arose when I considered how we encourage and empower beginning teachers' personal practical knowledge in the midst of life on a threshold. Heilbrun (1999) said, "Power is the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter" (p. 18). By this definition of power, the significance for Anna and Penny was whether or not their voices mattered. It was not the power that came from a man with a big stick, but rather the validation of those around them who

respected who they were and what they brought to the interaction. Power was having their voices matter.

Again, our habits of dealing with tension become significant when we think about empowering beginning teachers to claim their personal practical knowledge from the midst of shifting ground. If we approach the first 4 years of a teaching career with recognition that it is a “state of necessary in-betweenness [that is] understood and valued” (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 98), we make room for the voices of beginning teachers to matter. The first 4 years of a teaching career are filled with questions and experiments. As Heilbrun (1999) explains for any new experience, it is a time of living on the threshold where one is “amidst, among, atwixt, rooted nowhere except in the realm of questioning, experiment and adventure, and as it questions everything, it uses what it finds befitting” (p. 98). It becomes a place where more experienced teachers must continue to have faith in beginning teachers as we continue to search for new ways of relating to each other in schools.

*Maria Lugones.*

Anna’s and Penny’s experiences included stories of wanting to belong to the established school cultures they entered, yet they often felt like outsiders. Shifting from their personal lives into their professional lives included places where and times when they felt at ease and places where and times when they felt a lack of belonging. They were necessarily flexible at many points, which helped them negotiate uncertainty as they shifted into their roles as teachers on the

professional landscape, but there were also situations where a single plotline froze them in a place of tension. When shifts from personal to professional were smooth, flexibility was evident. When Anna and Penny were flexible and when the people in their new environment were flexible, they were more able to negotiate the shift. Lugones (1987) spoke about this flexibility between different situations as “world traveling” (p. 3) and suggested that world travelling requires a playful attitude and loving perception.

To the extent that we learn to perceive others arrogantly or come to see them only as products of arrogant perception and continue to perceive that way, we fail to identify with them, fail to love them. (Lugones, 1987, p. 4)

Lugones wrote about learning to perceive arrogantly as a child. She also spoke about being the object of arrogant perception. Although she spoke about arrogant and loving perception within a feminist ontology and epistemology within the Hispanic community, the ideas of world travelling resonate alongside Anna’s experiences as a Métis woman.

### **A Conceptual Framework**

I used the ideas of the authors above as an overarching conceptual framework. Their thoughts created support for the inquiry in ways that shape how I view tension; that an individual’s stories matter; that family shapes identity; and an awareness to perceiving arrogance in school settings. In the previous chapter, I situated this research in practical and social considerations. I explored the

practical in response to shifting the story of survival into educative experiences of curriculum making as a course of life for teachers at the beginning of a career and the social significance, through theoretical connection points such as world travel, saving stories, and making sense of tension-filled experiences during the early years, of composing professional stories to live by as a teacher. Through personal, social, and practical justification, I began listening for stories that Anna and Penny were composing as authors of their own lives from the midst of dominant institutional stories and stories of others around them. The research methodology that helped me understand their stories in the context of experience was narrative inquiry, which I describe in the following chapter. I move next into a description of narrative inquiry as the relational methodology I used in this research.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Narrative Inquiry: A Methodological Approach to Studying Experience**

Narrative inquiry is a research methodology focused on experience. With experience as my foundational ground for inquiry, I heard and had the opportunity to understand the experience of two beginning teachers.

I begin this section about methodology with a description of narrative inquiry as an established research practice. I then explain underlying intentions and conceptualize terms that are used within narrative inquiry. Next, I describe the methods I used for the project, and I conclude this chapter with a reminder that narrative inquiry opens possibilities for living beyond the research project.

#### **An established practice of narrative inquiry.**

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) suggested that the movement toward narrative inquiry was opened through a series of shifts in approach to methodology in scholarly communities. The four “turns” (p. 7) they identified in the research field were as follows:

1. Change in the relationship between the researcher and the researched
2. Move from the use of numbers toward the use of words as data
3. Change from a focus on the general and universal toward the local and specific
4. Widening in acceptance of alternative epistemologies or ways of knowing.

With these openings in the research community, space was made for the emergence of narrative methodologies in the social sciences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) entered this space with attention to the experiences that people live.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) began bringing narrative inquiry into the field of education as a methodology to understand the experience of people in schools. They built on Dewey's (1938) transactional theory of experience—attending to the criteria of continuity, interaction, and situation—as a way to think about teacher knowledge through the three-dimensional inquiry space, which is bounded by the commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

**Underlying intentions: Ontology of experience.**

Narrative inquiry is shaped by a Deweyan ontology of experience (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Everyday experience is where an inquiry begins, and everyday experience is what a narrative inquirer returns to throughout the research process. Narrative inquirers view experience as a narrative construction and hold a view that people live storied lives. Narrative inquiry is a methodology that inquires into storied experience. “Lives are lived, told, retold, and relived in storied ways on storied landscapes” (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009). Furthermore,

People shape their daily stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their

experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375)

The narratives that participants tell are important because of the experiences that they represent. The story that is told about an experience provides an opportunity to understand through unpacking particular situations between people in particular places with attention to each story having a past, present, and future. Story is a way of thinking about an individual's experience.

As Clandinin (2013) continued to develop narrative inquiry as a methodology, she brought her students to academic literature as a way to understand experience as a narrative activity. She wrote:

Paradigmatic and narrative knowing (Bruner, 1986), narrative structure and coherence of lives (Carr, 1986), concepts of continuity and improvisation as a response to the uncertainties of life and life contexts (Bateson, 1994) and narrative in life and teaching practice (Coles, 1989) also ground our understanding of experience as narratively composed. (p. 12)

Narrative inquiry assumes an understanding that people tell stories with their lives. People sustain a coherent narrative plotline through living each moment within a past and future of the story they are telling. Narrative inquiry is a methodology that acknowledges that people's lives are always in the creative

process of making a coherent life story. This process of living a coherent narrative while improvising when interruptions occur is a process of “living, telling, re-telling, and reliving” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Research begins from the middle of the stories people are telling with their lives. Narrative inquirers enter into a research project from the middle of their own and participants’ lives in progress. It is with respect for narratives already in motion that the research begins. It is this respect for entering into the midst of living, telling, retelling, and reliving from which ethical considerations in a study grow.

***Relational responsibilities: Ethical commitments.***

Relational responsibilities are ethical considerations that contribute to a respectful entrance into the research from the midst of lives in motion (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011). The negotiation of relationships, including a negotiated entry into the field, is important throughout the research study. The tradition of Clandinin and Connelly begins and ends with an embodied knowledge of relational practice. That is, narrative inquiry is a methodology that happens in relationship between people in which the researcher honours the participant as a co-composer (Clandinin, 2013) in the research.

Co-composing is relational work that is negotiated through all the phases of the inquiry. Narrative inquiry is a journey taken together as researcher and participant. I understand narrative inquiry spaces as being “spaces of belonging for both researchers and participants—spaces that are marked always by ethics and attitudes of openness, mutual vulnerability, reciprocity, and care” (Clandinin,



2013, p. 200). I continued to care for Anna's and Penny's stories told in those spaces as I wrote interim texts and final research texts. As a researcher, I was intentional about an ethical attitude of relationship throughout the entire research process. Because of my commitment to relationship with Anna and Penny, my methodology as a narrative inquirer invited different words to describe ethical considerations.

As a researcher you are answering to all your relations when you are doing research . . . you should be fulfilling your relationships with the world around you. So your methodology has to ask different questions: rather than asking about validity or reliability, you are asking how am I fulfilling my role in this relationship? What are my obligations in this relationship? (Wilson, 2001, p. 177)

I took up this obligation of responsibility in my research relationships with Anna and Penny in each research conversation. As I heard their stories, I paid attention to how I was shaping the inquiry space with my own responses and presence. I was careful to “learn an attitude of empathic listening, of not being judgmental and of suspending disbelief” (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007, p. 647). I listened with respect. Coles (1989) wrote, “their story, yours, mine—it’s what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them” (p. 30).

As I reflected on conversations and began to write research texts, I inquired with care. Anna and Penny continued to be co-composers as I checked

back and forth with them with what I wrote. Throughout the process, I kept in mind the importance of how this research project might benefit Anna and Penny. Relational inquiry involves negotiation and intentional co-composition as part of ethical considerations. From the moment I extended an invitation to Anna and Penny until research texts were completed, I was awake to honouring the relationship between us.

Ethical considerations for narrative inquiry are much more than adhering to ethics guidelines as set out by institutional review boards. Rather, as Josselson (2007) noted, “it is an ethical attitude toward narrative research, a stance that involves thinking through these matters and deciding how best to honor and protect those who participate in one’s studies while still maintaining standards for responsible scholarship” (p. 538). She reminds us that an ethical attitude requires that we remain awake to tensions and dilemmas within the work. Particularly, as a beginning narrative inquirer, it was in this context of an ethical stance that I leaned on my response community to hear their views. I wanted to be sure I was honouring my participants and did not always trust myself to be able to see all perspectives of a situation.

We can never be smug about our ethics since the ice is always thin, and there is no ethically unassailable position. We must interact with our participants humbly, trying to learn from them. We must protect their privacy. What we think might do harm we cannot publish. We cannot put our career advancement over the good of our participants. There will

always be dilemmas because virtue in this work stems from contextual ethics that are best specified in each situation through discussion with informed colleagues. I believe that if we work from these fundamental principles, we can do this work ethically enough. (Josselson, p. 560)

From this space that is morally and relationally sensitive, as well as technically and scholarly complex, I unpack stories that were told and then retold by me within the research relationship.

**Narrative inquiry terms for understanding experience.**

The language of narrative inquiry includes particular terms. Some of the terms that helped me to understand the experience, narratively, of people and therefore the beginning teachers in my inquiry are the *three-dimensional inquiry space* and the *commonplaces of narrative inquiry*; *stories to live by*; *tension*; and *living, telling, re-telling, and re-living*.

***Unpacking experience: The three-dimensional narrative inquiry space.***

Working from Dewey's (1938) criteria of experience shaped by understandings of interaction, continuity, and situation, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) formed the metaphorical term *three-dimensional narrative inquiry space*,

With this sense of Dewey's foundational place in our thinking about narrative inquiry, our terms are *personal* and *social* (interaction); *past, present, and future* (continuity); combined with the notion of *place* (situation). This set of terms creates a metaphorical *three-dimensional narrative inquiry space*. (p. 50)

I have defined my research with Anna and Penny by this three-dimensional space: it has temporal dimensions as I ask questions about their lives about the past, present, and future; I focus on personal and social matters that shape their identities; and I recognize that their experiences took place in specific places. In our weekly research conversations over 2 years, I asked questions, collected field notes, unpacked, and wrote a research text that simultaneously explored the inward, outward, backward, and forward (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994) of an experience. Clandinin and Connelly explain these four directions in relation to specific physical boundaries as terms to examine experience,

By inward, we mean toward the internal conditions such as feelings, hopes aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions. By outward, we mean toward the existential conditions, that is, the environment. By backward and forward, we refer to temporality—past, present, and future. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50)

I used these terms to address personal and social issues in Penny's and Anna's lives by looking inward and outward, and I addressed temporal issues by looking not only at the particular event they told me about but also to its past and to its future.

***Commonplaces of narrative inquiry.***

Narrative inquiry is situated in a conceptual framework of three commonplaces: "Attending to experience through attending to all three commonplaces simultaneously is, in part, what distinguishes narrative inquiry

from other methodologies” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 39). The three commonplaces are temporality, sociality, and place. These terms helped me stay close to experience and think “with stories” (Morris, 2001) rather than about stories in order to understand Anna’s and Penny’s lives being lived.

*Temporality* is a key term in narrative inquiry. Every event or situation has a past, present, and future. An experience is situated in a continuum over time.

Partially we mean, of course, that an experience is temporal. But we also mean that experiences taken collectively are temporal. We are therefore not only concerned with life as it is experienced in the here and now but also with life as it is experienced on a continuum—people’s lives, institutional lives, lives of things. Just as we found our own lives embedded within a larger narrative of social science inquiry, the people, schools, and educational landscapes we study undergo day-by-day experiences that are contextualized within a longer-term historical narrative. What we may be able to say now about a person or school or some other is given meaning in terms of the larger context, and this meaning will change as time passes. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19)

*Sociality* refers to the milieu where people’s experiences unfold.

Particular cultural, social, institutional, and familial narratives were pieces of the social context in which Anna and Penny were developing their identities as teachers. Their milieu included the push toward mandated outcomes,

standardized testing, and competing for top results in a global society. Their own familial stories collided with dominant school stories, which lead to tension points. These situations of tension opened places to pause and ask questions about their developing identity as professionals. When emotions were strong, I paid attention to what was going on both inwardly and outwardly, for them and for me,

Turning inward, we attend to our emotions, our aesthetic reactions, our moral responses. We attend to how these are shaped by familial narratives, family stories, as well as institutional narratives, such as stories of school, as well as by cultural and social narratives. Turning outward, we attend to what is happening, to the events and people in our experiences. We think simultaneously backward and forward, inward and outward, with attentiveness to places(s). (Clandinin, 2013, pp. 40–41)

*Place* is the third commonplace in narrative inquiry. Each narrative inquiry is situated in a particular place. *Place* refers to the specific physical, geographical location where the experience occurs. People and situations are always in relation to the land and sky around them. Life happens in places. I pay careful attention to how place has shaped Anna and Penny.

***Tension.***

Narrative inquiry as a methodology opens possibility for “rethinking moments of tension as places of inquiry” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 76). Because of the turn in approach to tension that narrative inquiry offers, we were able to tell

stories of vulnerability in ways that open into re-tellings and possible re-livings. Rather than smoothing over tension or regarding tension-filled situations as having a negative valence, narrative inquirers have grown to understand tension as a healthy space for shifts and growth.

As we thought about tensions, our understanding of the meanings of tensions began to shift and change. For many teachers, and indeed for many people, tensions are thought to have a negative valence, that is, tensions are something to be avoided or smoothed over. If there are tensions evident in a school it is usually seen as a problem. As we deepened our understandings around tensions we began to engage in self-facing, knowing how deeply we had learned to deny or cover over the tensions we ourselves had experienced as we lived on school landscapes. This process of self-facing has been a constant thread in our shared work together as we all remember, recollect, and inquire into how we had learned to erase, write over, and silence our felt tensions to maintain smooth stories of school.

Gradually, we began to understand tensions in a more relational way, that is, tensions that live between people, events, or things, and are a way of creating a between space, a space which can exist in educative ways. (Clandinin et al., 2009, p. 82)

Viewing tension as an educative space allowed for retelling and the possibility of reliving stories. In this way, tension was a thread to attend to in this

inquiry. Tension became a place to be wakeful to others with differing viewpoints. Tension became a reminder to be wakeful to the stories that were colliding at that moment. Tension lead to further understanding of what it means to be a teacher at the beginning of a professional career.

***Living, telling, retelling, reliving.***

The terms “*living, telling, retelling, and reliving*” (italics in original Clandinin, 2013, p. 34) are significant in narrative inquiry. The terms *living, telling,* and *retelling* trace the trajectory for narrative research, and *reliving* considers future possibilities for us as researchers, and possibly our participants and readers.

The terms—*living, telling, retelling, and reliving*—have particular meanings in narrative inquiry. We understand that people live out stories and tell stories of their living. Narrative inquirers come alongside participants . . . and begin to engage in narrative inquiry into our lived and told stories. We call this process of coming alongside participants and then inquiring into the lived and told stories retelling stories. Because we see that we are changed as we retell our lived and told stories. We may begin to relive our stories. As we retell stories, that is, inquire into them, we move beyond regarding stories as fixed entities and begin to retell our stories. In the inquiry process, we work within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space to “unpack” the lived and told stories. As we retell or inquire into stories, we may begin to relive the retold stories. We



restory ourselves and perhaps begin to shift the institutional, social, and cultural narratives in which we are embedded. (Clandinin, 2013, p. 34)

It is in the retelling and reliving that possibilities for different social narratives arise. As Anna and Penny told stories of tension and uncertainty in the safety of regular, sustained, research conversations, our questions and sharing together lead to imaginative retellings, which then shifted into reliving some situations in different ways. In our conversations, there was little certainty and fewer answers, yet the process of questioning together as collaborative researcher and participant allowed healthier ways of possibilities for living with tension and created educative spaces rather than situations of leaving.

### **Methods.**

Questions of epistemology such as “how do we know what we know” lead me to specifying the methods in my research in the following section. Research puzzles rather than setting a research question, negotiating entry into the field, and response community are significant considerations as we move between narrative beginnings, field texts, interim texts, and then research texts.

There is intentional movement from field to field texts, field texts to interim texts, and finally to research texts. Relational response communities provide feedback to sustain the researcher throughout the research process. Response communities also deepen understanding of the experience as they lend their own personal and professional experience to the conversation.

Wonders about beginning-teacher experience shape this inquiry. I did not begin with an expectation of an answer to a precise research question, but rather framed the puzzle with “a sense of a search, a “re-search,” a searching again” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124). Dominant research narratives set out research questions, while narrative inquiries begin from the midst of “lives in motion” (Huber et al., 2011). Understanding lives being in the act of creation asks for research that attends to this ongoing creating. I began in the midst of living stories. I was in the midst of my own personal and professional life. Therefore, my puzzle needed to attend to this act of being.

***Entering the field and being in relationship.***

I was in the midst of a life as an elementary school teacher with particular stories of classroom community and institutional stories. My participants were also in the midst of their lives of personal, professional, social, familial, political, and cultural stories. Our lives came together in an inquiry relationship through an introduction from my advisor, who had also been their professor in their undergraduate degrees.

The beginning teachers in this inquiry travelled from their familial homes as young women to their university classrooms as students and into their elementary school classrooms as professional teachers. Gaps existed between the stories they lived out in their families and those lived out in educational settings. In some situations their stories of who they were fractured along the path toward becoming teachers. The divide between personal lives, professional lives as

students, and professional lives as teachers in elementary schools caused tension for them in their new identities as public school teachers. Stories planted by their families, grand narratives told by expert theorists at the university, and stories that real teachers are meant to embody in the field (Young et al., 2010) created gaps between personal knowledge, theory, and practice. Narrative inquirers and their research participants live in and between familial stories, school stories, and university stories. I became increasingly interested in the gap between Anna's and Penny's recent experience at university and their current beginnings in schools, and the way family stories both helped them make sense and shaped them in both places.

Clandinin and Connelly (1998) refer to the metaphor of a narrow ridge found in Martin Buber's (1957/1996) concept of a community of otherness. Buber's work conceptualized communities where people with different perspectives thrived. Clandinin and Connelly interpreted Buber's notion of the narrow ridge in the following way:

He imagined the community of otherness as located on a narrow ridge, a place of tension between two gulfs where there is "no sureness of knowledge" but only a "certainty of meeting." The ridge allows the possibility of "overcoming otherness" in a lived unity that is the community. (p. 247)

It is on a narrow ridge of a path that new teachers travel and meet people.

Perhaps if there was an attitude of embracing the beginning teacher in mutual

understanding and mutual negotiation, all parties would be mutually sustained rather than falling to one side or another.

As a narrative inquirer, I negotiated entry into the field by first coming to the narrow ridge with the willingness to see Anna's and Penny's different points of view. I came to the narrow ridge with the understanding that there is no sureness of knowledge, only a certainty of meeting. As a narrative inquirer, negotiating entry into the field, I looked for ways to meet my participants on a narrow ridge. I also began to imagine a relationship between teachers at the beginning of their careers and the schools where they were teaching within Buber's notion of the narrow ridge. I wondered about a narrow ridge between a beginning teacher and the institution of school that he or she would be contracted to teach in. I imagined the personal knowledge landscape of a beginning teacher on one side of the ridge and the professional knowledge landscape of schools on the other side of the ridge. I wondered what might happen if schools came to the narrow ridge with less sureness of knowledge and if there might be the opportunity for "only a certainty of meeting."

***Moving from field to field texts.***

This research was initially shaped by weekly conversations where Anna and Penny told stories about their experiences, both in and out of school. While both participants took me to places that were important to them, and I lived alongside them to a certain degree, most of the field texts were created during research conversations in which they told stories of their experiences.

Conversations create a space for the stories of both participants and researchers to be composed and heard. Conversations are not guided by predetermined questions, or with intentions of being therapeutic, resolving issues, or providing answers to questions. (Clandinin, 2013, p. 45)

The intention of research conversations in this inquiry was to generate field texts that captured Anna's and Penny's stories and led to eventual understandings of their experience. Our conversations were about teaching and the living related to teaching.

I interpreted transcripts of conversations, field notes, artefacts, photographs, portfolios, and other field texts together along the way so that what was written represented the lived experience in ways that grew out of the relationship between researcher and participant.

***Moving from field texts to interim research texts.***

Each week when I left the research conversation space, I began analysis and interpretation at a physical distance from the participants. I worked within the three-dimensional inquiry space to write interim research texts that represented narratives of experience in ways that showed temporality, sociality, and place.

Multiple possibilities for interpretation presented themselves as I spent time reading and rereading our conversations. Uncertainty and tension were strong as I began to puzzle about emerging threads of experience. I took my thoughts and writing back to Anna and Penny regularly (drafts of analysis and

interim research texts), and I was deeply aware of holding our relationship in a place of respect. I wanted my interpretation to resonate for them.

Living in relationship with the participants was full of intersections that required attention to complexities. Deep relationships grew from weekly research conversations over 2 years. Frustrations and uncertainty in their lives were part of the conversations, and because of the way narrative inquiry attends to tension, feelings of vulnerability often shaped our conversations. I found that through the process of narrative inquiry:

Teachers feel listened to, researchers find themselves doing something human, and we sense that each feels closer and more in tune with one another as researchers collect and tell teacher stories. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 245)

These experiences of research relationship over time shaped my understanding of what it meant to be a beginning teacher.

***Moving from interim research texts to research texts.***

I spent 2 years writing and rewriting interim research texts. Research conversations ended, and although I was still in touch with Anna as I wrote narrative accounts and interim research texts, Penny indicated that she was ready to be finished with her connection to my further writing. She said she trusted me with her stories into the next stages of writing and felt she did not have time to commit to anything further. This caused tension for me. I could check regularly, in person with Anna about what I was writing, but not with Penny. This shaped a

new understanding of what it meant to co-compose. My understanding of co-composing did not only entail member checking at the end of my writing of research texts alone at my desk, but also required interaction and sharing of the ideas that went into the writing. With Anna, co-composing entailed a continued attention to the relational aspects of my narrative inquiry. With Penny, co-composing included her confidence in the relationship we had created thus far and her trust in me as the writer. I always kept in mind my obligations to Anna and Penny as people. However, with Penny, because I could not see her in person, I finished the chapter I had begun about her and turned my consideration toward Anna's experience for further chapters in the dissertation. Throughout the writing of research text I was hyper-vigilant in attention to field notes and representing both Anna and Penny in ways that resonated with them. As I wrote research texts, I imagined Anna and Penny sitting beside me, their imagined presence a constant reminder of my ethical commitment to them.

My "response community" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 210) helped me negotiate this tension as I worked to represent the complexities of Anna's and Penny's lives on paper. My works-in-progress group, research issues tables, and the broader international narrative inquiry community sustained me. They were people I trusted and who held me accountable to writing the bigness of Anna's life and who helped me to "say more" when they could not understand my words on paper. They shared ideas and pointed me to examples in literature when I felt stuck. They also reminded me to let my voice be heard in the midst of learning to

write academically as they said, “Where’s Lynne?” It has been a rigorous 5 years of research, and my stories of beginning teachers have shifted. I am reminded that I am in the midst of a life that is rich with rethinking and reimagining and living in relationship.

Final research texts do not have final answers, because narrative inquirers do not come with questions. These texts are intended to engage audiences to rethink and reimagine the ways in which they practice and the ways in which they relate to others. (Clandinin, 2013, p. 51)

Although many wonders shaped my research puzzle, I did not begin the inquiry with the goal of finding single answers to particular questions. Rather, questions opened spaces for rethinking and reimagining possibilities.

#### **A methodology for living beyond the research text.**

Narrative inquiry is a methodology that continues beyond the last word written on the page. Narrative inquiry—grounded in concern for relational living, telling, retelling, and reliving—reveals life in points of tension, and from the midst of that tension points a way forward for stories of possibility among teachers. Because narrative inquiry is a human experience of living in relationship together, it offers a counter story of wholeness and trust from the midst of our fractured and cynical age (Okri, 1997). Even as this inquiry concludes, the methodology allows me to continue in the midst of living, telling, retelling, and reliving the stories of our experiences. Relationship is central to ethical concerns of narrative inquiry. These ethical considerations are more than



review board forms and pseudonyms that assure anonymity. My first priority was always to Anna and Penny—the people they were and the lives they were leading. While we set the time for weekly research conversations to be 1 year, this time commitment was always flexible in my mind. After one year, Penny’s life had shifted and her time became limited which ended our regular conversations. Anna continued to be in relationship with me through the writing of this final research text. The formal research conversations stopped in the midst of the process of making up our lives; methodology continues in ways we live and opens possibilities for re-living.

The regulative ideal for inquiry is to generate a new relation between a human being and her environment—her life, community, world—one that “makes possible a new way of dealing with them, and thus eventually creates a new kind of experienced object, not more real than those which preceded but more significant, and less overwhelming and oppressive.

(Clandinin, 2013, p. 15)

Narrative inquiry opens possibilities for living beyond the research project into ways that are less oppressive and more educative.

This narrative inquiry is about the stories beginning teachers live by, their involvement in relational curriculum making with children in classrooms, and their own “personal practical knowledge” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). It is about beginning teachers who live with tension as their stories collide with the

stories of others around them. It is about living multiple personal and professional stories at the beginning of a teaching career.

This dissertation is structured as a series of manuscripts that are in circulation for publication with professional journals. What follows, then, are four manuscripts about identity making at the beginning of a career. The first is about navigating familiar and unfamiliar experiences, the second discusses shaping a professional identity with regard to particular stories that are shaped by personal experience, the third attends to how identity is a relational endeavor that is both interrupted and sustained, and the last is about teacher knowledge and the ways intellectual work influences an identity at the beginning of a career.

## **Chapter Four: Navigating Familiar and Unfamiliar Experiences**

### **Travelling between Worlds: Familial Stories that Bump in the Classroom**

#### **Abstract.**

The following chapter focuses on the familial stories that Anna carried into her professional world of curriculum making in a classroom with children. It is situated within a larger research project that explored identity making for teachers at the beginning of their careers. With attention to experience, this chapter focuses on how identity making for a beginning teacher is shaped in curriculum-making moments at the intersections of familial stories that met in his or her classroom. I take up Lugones's (1987) ideas around world travelling, arrogant perception, and loving perception to highlight the ways world travelling shaped Anna's experiences. I gave particular attention to moments of world travelling that were marked with tension—stories where worlds collided. "Where do you begin telling someone their world is not the only one?" (Maracle, 1993, p. 72)

#### **Introducing the Participant**

I first met Anna during the bustle of the Christmas season. It was a Saturday. She was wearing a knitted white tam over her long, dark hair, a turquoise-blue woolen coat, and tall leather boots that she stamped the snow from when she came into the coffee shop. I felt like I might be in a French café when I first saw her. It took me a second to see that she was looking for me, and when she came over to my table, I was immediately glad for the chance to know her. A

flair for the dramatic hung in the air in that first moment of meeting. She told stories of her classroom that began with “I am having trouble organizing my thoughts about the job that I hate. A piece of my soul is left there every day,” (December 16, 2010) and she told stories of her family:

I am Métis, we make fun of ourselves. That is my world view. My European ancestors slept with the First Nations, sorry, you are going to have to live with that. Here I am. I learned how to count playing Bingo. I’m sorry. (Excerpt from research conversation December 16, 2010)

Anna taught Grade 4 at Riverstone School, an elementary school in a western Canadian province. She was in her second year of teaching. Throughout her childhood, her family moved annually because of her father’s employment, which meant Anna packed up her stories to live by every autumn. Childhood stories of being able to quickly make new friends in new places were in constant tension with stories of not belonging. These same stories travelled with her into her new career as an adult. She knew herself to be able to adjust to her new colleagues and school, while at the same time felt she was on the margins of a story already in motion.

During research conversations, Anna told stories of her life with children in their school and classroom. It was these moments, where different lives met in a classroom, that I inquired into. I paid particular attention to how the familial stories of children in her classroom shaped Anna. I focused on the familial stories of others that bumped with the stories that Anna came to teaching with. Indeed,

she encountered experiences where familial stories were stories she was expected to live out in the classroom, even though they were not part of her own personal practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). These experiences of making sense in the context of others formed her identity and shaped who she was as a teacher.

### **Making a Professional Story to Live By**

The narrative term for identity, *story to live by*, is a term that explains how “knowledge, context and identity are linked and can be understood narratively” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4). Anna’s professional story to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994), her understanding of what it meant to be a teacher, was shaped first by experiences from her life with her family and in the schools she attended as a child and young adult. Her professional story to live by continued as her peers and professors at university, colleagues, administrators, children in her classroom, and the children’s families at her internship schools shaped her experiences. In coming to understand how Anna composed and lived out her own shifting teacher knowledge and multiple stories to live by, I wondered about how beginning teachers are sustained in their professional worlds during the first years of their careers.

### **Familial Stories That Met in Curriculum-making Moments**

Curriculum making “might be viewed as an account of teachers’ and children’s lives together in schools and classrooms . . . [in this view of curriculum making] the teacher is seen as an integral part of the curricular process . . . in

which teacher, learner, subject matter and milieu are in dynamic interaction” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 392). The concept of curriculum making relies on Dewey’s (1938) philosophy of experiential education. After experimenting and observing interactions in schools, he insisted that education be grounded in a theory of experience rather than an approach that delivered predetermined knowledge. His philosophy of experience involved both continuity and interaction between the learner and what is learned. These two principles were situated in particular places, which also influenced the learning experience. Dewey (1938) also indicated that some experiences were not educational, such as an experience that prevented or distorted further growth. He called these experiences that limit growth *mis-educative*. On the other hand, experiences that resulted in further growth were at the heart of experience-based education and occurred within a continuity of experience or the experiential continuum. Dewey called these kinds of experiences *educative*. Anna’s story of what it meant to be a teacher was interrupted by both educative and mis-educative experiences along the way. Her story to live by was shaped by her experiences and how she was able to understand each situation.

These interruptions were sometimes tension filled as Anna’s understanding of being a teacher clashed with her understandings of others. In many situations where her story was challenged, she was able to make sense of the situation through reflection and decisions, based on prior experience. In other situations of uncertainty, she was unable to move forward, and her growth as a

teacher was prevented. In the following piece of conversation transcript, Anna told about a situation in which she navigated a particular situation where the understandings of different people collided in the classroom. The tension point began when a parent of a child in her classroom questioned why she didn't put up a Christmas tree or have a gift exchange in the classroom before the Christmas holiday.

University did not prepare me for this. I get the strong feeling [from the administrator and some teachers at school] that it's not my place to ask questions. It's an air about the profession and a climate of aggressive people in our school. I am getting a strong sense that I really need to re-evaluate this career. I am there at 7:00 every morning and don't finish till 8:00 or 9:00 at night. [But more than that] it's so much flak from parents. Like one parent called in because I didn't have a Christmas tree set up. Or not having secret Santa. Those phone calls consume me in so many ways. A piece of my soul is left there every day. My husband is sick of me investing so much of myself. It's too much. I think I could leave teaching right now, and in the big picture of my life, chalk it up to a bad experience. (Excerpt from research conversation with Anna on December 16, 2010)

I chose this moment of curriculum making because it raises questions about how beginning teachers, children, and their families negotiate the meeting of their diverse beliefs and ways of living in the world. In the previous moment, I

saw the meeting of the Grade 4 children and their families who did celebrate Christmas, the Grade 4 children and their families who did not celebrate Christmas, and Anna, who did celebrate Christmas in her home but was aware of those who did not in her classroom. Christmas was a holiday that occurred in some families but not in others. Holidays, such as Christmas, were times where many familial stories presented themselves between people in Anna's classroom. From the midst of a multicultural community and families with diverse financial resources, one parent responded to Anna's decision not to have a gift exchange or a Christmas tree in the classroom. While it was only one parent who challenged Anna on this point, it felt like an aggressive act in which Anna worried that she was not pleasing the parent of a child who mattered to her.

Unpacking this moment highlights the tension and uncertainty in the negotiation between people who come from different familial stories to live by and meet in a curriculum-making moment in the classroom. They travelled from their own experiences to the boundary of experiences of others, but that is where their stories stopped. They each stayed in their own worlds, approaching the same subject matter from a difference of experience. The subject matter in the moment of curriculum making was Christmas—a holiday that some children in the classroom celebrated and some did not—and a particular way of celebrating with a secret Santa gift exchange that required financial resources that not everyone had access to. In Anna's community context, Christmas was part of a dominant societal story. The children who celebrated Christmas came to school



from powerful stories of religious communities, shopping malls, and media marketing. In the midst of negotiating the web of interactive familial stories, Anna expected the families of the children in her classroom to travel into each other's experiences to understand why she chose not to put up a tree or exchange gifts. Anna did not tell specific stories of teaching what Christmas represented. However, I understood that Anna expected the children in her classroom to live by familial stories of how they understood Christmas. Stories to live by included the birth of a saviour or prophet, and included the same stories interpreted as a myth for some. The media-driven hype in shopping malls was not something Anna wanted to perpetuate in her classroom. She understood that the way Christmas was represented and experienced depended on each individual's familial background. In spite of her belief in diverse identities, the amount of energy and time she put into preparation for other subject-matter mandated outcomes left her little space for curriculum making with children to inquire into each other's various perspectives on Christmas or the process that individuals could learn to do so. She expected the children and their families to be open to each other's worlds and embrace diverse world views. Because of her own familial stories to live by, she expected others would have the skills to do this as well.

Anna opened up other tensions with her account. She described the tone in her school as aggressive. She juxtaposed the parent concern with how hard she worked as she explained that "I am there at 7:00 every morning and don't finish

till 8:00 or 9:00 at night. [But more than that] it's so much flak from parents.”

She felt tension between what she heard the parent expecting and her feelings that she already did so much. The tension lay between the parent's expectations that *you should do this* and Anna thinking *I do so much*. There is also tension between her feelings of being unprepared by the university and at the same time telling the story of herself as a knowledgeable person. Juxtapositions pulled at her stories to live by. Tension between knowledge and uncertainty shaped the ways Anna, the children in her classroom, and their families negotiated the meeting of their diverse worlds. Tension shaped her relationships on her personal knowledge landscape as well; her husband expressed his frustration with how much of herself she gave to school. These negotiations were about world travelling for Anna and others she met in school. Anna's identity outside of school was in contrast with how she understood the parent and the principal perceived her. This created tension in ways that froze her in place until she could make sense of the situation in new ways. While she gave all of herself to making sense of situations such as the Christmas experience, she felt frozen in the administrator's and parents' story of who she was. Because she could see no way forward, she could not understand the parents' world or the administrator's world, this was a miseducative experience for her. There were miseducative experiences for her with her colleague's story of who she was too. Yet it was easier for her to move on from the midst of tension with another teacher. She explains this tension in the following excerpt of transcript:

When I disagree with people, like the teacher librarian who has a different world view than I do, especially when we were talking about inquiry learning in our unit on light, I get cemented in my feet. So I just have to get over that. She didn't agree with students taking notes from the board but I just decided it's what we all needed to do. So we did our first little set of notes. I hate taking notes, but I thought, you know what? Its peaceful. (January 8, 2011)

Anna made choices that sometimes interrupted her own narrative of who she was as a teacher, but did so because she was sustaining herself in a new experience.

### **Worlds and World Travelling: Frozen in Separate Places**

Maria Lugones (1987) spoke about the various “worlds” people come from and travel to in daily life. She offers a sense of the term *world* to be suggestive and not a firm definition. She says a world offers possibility but not utopia. It is a physical place inhabited at present by flesh-and-blood people, but the people might be alive, imagined, or dead. A world can be a society, or it can be a smaller portion of a society. It might be an incomplete visionary construction, or it might be a traditional construction. It is not a world view and yet has something to do with world view. In a world, one might not hold the construction that others have made of them. One can inhabit more than one world at a time and have memories of the worlds one travels between. One can also feel more at ease in one world or another. Some of the parents in Anna's classroom community were not able to leave their own worlds to travel to the worlds of

others, and consequently could not see why Anna chose not to have a tree or a gift exchange. “World traveling [is a way to] understand what it is like to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes” (Lugones, 1987, p. 17). As Anna and the children and their families navigated between each other’s worlds, they were learning to understand what it was like to celebrate Christmas or not, and they were learning who they were in relation to the Christian and/or corporate story of Christmas.

Using Lugones’s ideas of world travelling helps me understand Anna’s experiences in her classroom with many different familial stories. Perhaps parents travelled to each other’s worlds as tourists rather than as people immersed in a culture they are involved in. Anna and her students created a world in their classroom with their own unique values and ways of being. It was a foreign world for parents. Children and teachers live in the world of school in a different way than parents do. As Anna explained in the following field text, she was aware of her role as a navigator between worlds.

As a teacher I try to see children and how they are finding their places in our classroom community. I respect their world views. I respect their families and how each person comes to school with their own unique life. I try to think about the child’s family as I negotiate what it means to be a teacher in their lives. My classroom is not a competitive place of individual arrogance. It’s a place of respect for diverse ways. I work hard

at making it a place where every child matters. (Excerpt from research conversation, December 2010)

Anna respected diverse familial stories; however, many tensions surrounded Anna's telling of the given Christmas tree moment, which reflected other moments in her teaching. One of the tensions that emerged was around the underlying tone that Christmas was an accepted tradition for all, while occasions for many of the children included completely different celebrations. The parent assumed all the children in the classroom would know about and want to participate in Christmas celebrations. The assumption was that all children and their families would travel to this dominant world. Anna felt tension in how this positioned children in the classroom, and she spoke up against the idea.

Beyond the meeting of diverse stories about Christmas traditions, other tensions surrounded that particular issue. Anna's expression of feeling overwhelmed was the backdrop from which she dealt with the tension of Christmas negotiations. She spoke about feeling frustrated, unprepared, unable to ask questions, and worried about her reputation. She felt consumed by her professional story. The long hours exhausted her physically, and the relational negotiations between parents who could not travel to other worlds left her in a position where she left a piece of her soul in the classroom each day. Anna's husband affirmed that she was giving too much of herself, although he understood that the beginning of a career required an investment of time and self that would set a foundation for a future career. Anna's professional world was demanding

too much of her and leaving little time or energy for her to sustain other worlds outside school. Anna was different in her personal world than she was in her professional world, and yet she took her variety of experiences with her as she world travelled. She used these experiences to negotiate bumping stories in moments of curriculum making, but she wondered if her world of school was crowding out her other worlds. Anna's professional world consumed much of her time and physical strength well beyond the hours of the school day, and her emotional energy was exhausted as she held the tension of personal familial stories that collided with familial stories of others. I wondered why it was so difficult for Anna to travel away from the world of school, and whether this was a common story among beginning teachers.

Another tension that surrounded Anna's experience of the curriculum-making moment was that she felt an underlying tone of aggression from other individuals on the professional knowledge landscape.<sup>7</sup> She felt that administrators and parents around her did not welcome her questions. When she felt she could not ask questions with a voice that mattered, the situation inhibited her ability to world travel. This tension was situated in the underlying tone that Anna was not allowed to bring her knowledge of negotiating community into the place of deciding whether or not to celebrate Christmas. In the following field note, I wondered if the administrator was possibly shielding her from a mis-

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<sup>7</sup> Clandinin and Connelly (1995) use the metaphor of a professional knowledge landscape as a way to describe the complex qualities of schools. They explained that as teachers move between in-classroom places (where knowledge *of* teachers is practised) and out-of-classroom places (where knowledge *for* teachers is prescribed), they experience dilemmas and tensions.

educative experience. However, Anna wanted her voice to matter in the negotiation process, and interpreted her administrator's actions to be a way of negating her influence in the situation.

Anna felt she was not treated as a knowledgeable person when her administrator advised that she not talk to the particular parent again unless administration was present to lead the conversation. It was in this unfamiliar space of "not her place to ask questions" that Anna felt like an outsider in school. (Field notes, December 2010)

In this situation, Anna perceived the administrator and the parent as not understanding why she refused to put up a Christmas tree. The parent's comment was perceived as aggressive rather than an educative opportunity. Anna spoke about waking up at night with worry about how she was perceived by her administrator and the parents in her classroom. Perhaps part of the reframing that parents, administrators, and teacher educators need to do is to carefully look at ways that criticism affects beginning teachers. Perhaps it is an inability to identify with the beginning teacher that is key to shifting these kinds of situations into educative experiences. Lugones (1987) wrote of arrogant perception as "a failure to identify with" (p. 4) another person. Anna articulated her classroom to be a noncompetitive place without individual arrogance, and she perceived the parent to be acting from cultural separation and the administrator to be coming from a hierarchical institutional story. Arrogant perception, the failure to identify with Anna, restricted her ability to navigate between the many familial stories in

her classroom and created a mis-educative space for her. Perhaps Anna ended the story and didn't travel to the gift giver's world as a way of holding space open for other stories. She made an intentional decision not to travel to the world of buying gifts in her classroom. Arrogant perception in an act of self facing for Anna helped her sort out who she wanted to be and who she did not want to be as a teacher in a classroom with children.

### **Building Bridges Between Worlds of Family and School**

As Anna negotiated situations of tension, she used her past experience to make plans for her classroom. She wanted the current experience to fit into the continuum of experience that she had begun outside of school as she worked to bridge personal and professional experiences. This negotiation process relied on personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), which brought together Anna's experience between her personal and professional worlds.

Personal practical knowledge is "in the person's past experience, in the person's present mind and body, and in the person's future plans and actions" (p. 25).

Personal practical knowledge is what Anna drew on when she dealt with the tension of present situations and dilemmas she experienced in her classroom as she worked to find a way forward.

As a child, Anna learned to make new relationships and adapt quickly to new places. Her experiences in a familial story included moving frequently to accommodate her father's employment. This taught her what it felt like to be the person on the edge of a community. Recalling how her teachers facilitated this



experience of belonging when she was a child influenced how she made sense of the situation at Christmastime in her first classroom as teacher. What she knew from past experience in her personal life influenced how she made sense as a professional of difficult situations at school. Each child in her classroom also came with stories of belonging and stories of celebrating Christmas or not. The interface between Anna's personal practical knowledge and her students' knowledge was shaped, in part, by what their families taught them at home. For Anna and the children in her classroom, their families were the worlds they knew first. Making bridges between familial worlds was complex.

Anna carried familial stories that had been shaped in her worlds outside of school into her world of Riverstone School. When she could not travel into other people's worlds, or when others could not travel into hers, she leaned toward other career possibilities. She re-evaluated her choice to be a teacher in schools. The direction of her experiences in school shifted toward leaving.

The story of leaving was a complex story Anna had lived in her own familial story. She knew how to pack up her things and her stories to live by as she prepared each fall to move with her family for her father's employment.

Lugones (1987) spoke of loving perception, which is how Anna understood others' relational responsibility to her, like her grandmother and her aunts who taught her about living in relation to the land and people around her. Her grandmother and her aunts were teachers in her familial stories, and she expected teachers and elders in her school community to also be teachers who

saw their learners with loving perception. Simultaneously, she had lived through situations where public schools and other places in her personal world had been places of arrogant perception (Lugones, 1987) and racism.

Anna's familial experiences were situated within a societal story of colonialism. Her Métis heritage was part of her story to live by, which came from the world of her family. For Anna, racism was linked to both traumatic events and subtle happenings. Racism was an embodied knowing through traumatic memories of emotional and physical abuse that occurred during childhood into young adulthood. Subtle memories of embarrassment in which she took off her mukluks a block away from school and hid them in her backpack before going up the steps of the school were an everyday occurrence. Experiences where she had been the object of racism preyed upon her imagination as she negotiated the unfamiliar worlds of school as a beginning teacher. Alongside the family stories that Anna told with love was a constant fear that the listener would perceive those beloved stories with arrogant perception. For Anna, there was always a question of whether criticism from a parent in her classroom was coming from a place of discrimination situated in a larger cultural story of colonialism. These stories that she knew first, stories to live by, were stories that nearly destroyed her as she apologized to others for who she was.

Part of Anna's story to live by is that of being othered by the dominant society. Because of this story to live by, supported by a historical narrative, Anna expected people around her would not perceive her with loving perception—

would not travel to her world. One way to think about racism is as a breakdown in people's ability to travel metaphorically into each other's worlds in the ways that Lugones suggests is necessary for understanding. Expecting arrogant perception from others was also a breakdown in Anna's own ability to world travel. Stories of racism travelled with her from the early years of her childhood, and she was unable to let go of them. It was a story that went with her into unfamiliar worlds of school when parents were aggressive.

Making sense of how to be a teacher in light of familial stories that expected both arrogant and loving perception was a challenge for Anna. In the story of the Christmas tree/secret Santa gift exchange, Anna tried to understand how parents perceived her before she could act from her own stories to live by. Her stories bumped with stories of other families and also with institutional stories perpetuated in schools. Anna's identity was shaped in moments where personal world stories to live by of family bumped against institutional stories of school.

A final tension, which Anna expressed at the beginning of the first piece of transcript from the research conversations, was that university did not prepare her for the experiences she was having in school. The connection between university stories and Anna's stories of school did not always lead to educative places. This indicates a need to re-examine how we are preparing pre-service teachers. How do we re-imagine possibilities for educative experiences for beginning teachers? How do we remain attentive to the lives of beginning

teachers in the midst of negotiating curriculum making and world travelling that happens between their own stories and the stories of children and families in their classrooms?

### **Between Familiar and Unfamiliar Worlds**

Personal experiences with family were important to Anna. It was within her family that Anna learned about combining “familiar and unfamiliar components in response to new situations” (Bateson, 1990, p. 3). Bateson (2000) reminds us that “we live with strangers” and even those we love most, “with whom we share a shelter, a table, a bed . . . parents, children, partners, siblings, and friends repeatedly surprise us, revealing the need to learn where we are most at home . . . there is strangeness hidden in the familiar” (p. 3). Anna looked for the familiar in the midst of new experiences, but so too were children and families in her classroom looking for the familiar in the midst of a world that was strange to them. Anna composed her life over time in both familiar and unfamiliar situations, improvising in each interaction while weaving what she knew in her personal worlds with what she was encountering in unfamiliar professional worlds. Composing a professional life was a creative process of continuity and improvisation—negotiation between worlds—as a response to the uncertainties of life and life contexts (Bateson, 1994).

Each student and teacher come into the classroom with their own stories of what they knew first in their families and communities outside of school.

Clandinin et al. (2011) further describe this engagement within families as familial curriculum making. They described familial curriculum making to be:

An account of parents'/ families' and children's lives together in homes and communities where the parents and families are an integral part of the curricular process in which families, children/learners, subject matter, and home and community milieu are in dynamic interaction. (pp. 7–8)

Anna's continuum of personal knowledge held respect for diversity as a strong narrative thread. It was a story to live by that she learned within the web of her familial curriculum making (Clandinin et al., 2011) over time. She explains in the following transcript:

I come from Cree, Saulteaux, Scottish, Ojibwa, French roots. I identify as being Métis. I moved 13 times before I was 6 years old, and left home when I was 14. I see life through a lens of possibilities. At the same time moments of hopelessness overwhelm me. My brother experienced the same life differently. My mom sees life through a lens of blessings.

Because there was so much diversity in my life with my family I learned that you need to be exposed to difference to see what you are not. You also need to be exposed to sameness to see yourself reflected in others.

(Excerpt from research conversation, April 2011)

This plotline of respect for diverse perspectives carried into her personal practical knowledge in her current Grade 4 teaching position at Riverstone Elementary School. Anna's familial story of respect for diversity was a story her

family told as part of who they were. Similarly, stories such as Christmas were part of curriculum making in some families, but not in others.

Another familial story that Anna learned within her family was about play. Play on her grandparent's homestead included getting dirty. Play happened alongside adults like her grandmother and aunts, who attended to her lovingly. This understanding of play was rooted in openness to surprise. It was an attitude that began in curiosity rather than competence or ego. Lugones (1987) talks about world travelling with a loving attitude and a sense of playfulness. She saw playfulness differently than how it is viewed in a competitive plotline. She referred to playfulness in the competitive plotline as agonistic, which predicates a view based in arrogant perception. Agonistic play is about "winning, losing, battling . . . [and] competence" (Lugones, 1987, p. 15), where the world traveller is set on conquering other worlds. The following field text demonstrates a moment of curriculum making in which Anna, based on her story to live by shaped by her grandmother, took a stand against an agonistic institutional story to live by. She said

One morning I saw a parent comparing her son's picture to others on the bulletin board outside our classroom. An interesting thing I found . . . a little boy who is very hard on himself . . . his mom comes up and he says "Oh, look mom, there's mine!" She's like, "Oh?" She moves over to another student's and "WOW!!!" And I'm like, "What?" (Excerpt from research conversation January 10, 2011)

When Anna heard the mother implicitly comparing her son's artwork to the other student's work, she worried that this comparison would hurt the child. She removed all the artwork from the bulletin board the next day and decided to leave it empty. It was a bold choice in a school that prided itself on displaying student work. She worried what her administrator would say, but Anna did not mention that the administrator ever said anything about her choice to have a blank bulletin board. Bold choices in everyday moments came up frequently. Anna did not embrace this tension. She did not speak to the parent or child directly about the child's work on the bulletin board. She tried to negotiate the situation in a playful way, using the most bizarre solution she could think of.

Lugones (1987) suggested going to another person's world with a loving attitude of playfulness that carries openness to surprise, openness to self-construction, and openness to being a fool. She suggested travelling without rigid rules but rather with a creative mindset and respect for differences.

Playfulness is in part, an openness to being a fool, which is a combination of not worrying about competence, not being self-important, not taking norms as sacred and finding ambiguity and double edges a source of wisdom and delight. (Lugones, 1987, p. 17)

This attitude of playfulness is not found in teacher induction models or institutional stories of achievement in schools. Exploring Lugones's work further reveals another definition of play. Her description of agonistic play seemed more fitting in relation to how Anna was experiencing her world of school. Lugones

(1987) described agonistic play as having to do with “contest, winning, losing, and battling” (p. 15).

An agonistic sense of playfulness is one in which competence is supreme. You better know the rules of the game. In agonistic play there is risk, there is uncertainty, but the uncertainty is about who is going to win and who is going to lose. (p. 15)

Anna’s experience in school was agonistic in the sense that her story of what it meant to be a teacher was sometimes in competition with the stories of others. Her story of appreciation for individual diversity ran parallel to the story of competition to have the best artwork displayed. Anna spoke about the administrator in the school valuing bulletin boards as a way of decorating the school and the parent who compared her child’s work in a way that did not encourage diversity. She also talked about the competition between teachers that came with putting up student artwork in the hallway and that it was not something she did unless it was tied to curricular outcomes.

When you have grade alike classrooms side by side, especially if one of the classrooms is made up of academically talented kids and the other is the class of regular kids and special needs kids. Crazy idea to put bulletin boards in between, who came up with that anyway? Honestly, we have a quilt hanging beside our classroom that was made by ACTEL Grade 5s and honestly it could be hung up in the Malken Art Gallery, and my class are struggling with brush strokes! Why can’t we get rid of bulletin



boards? I am about process in my classroom. I don't always do product. Its messy and then I also hang up the curriculum outcome on the bulletin board that the children were working on. I get razzed by colleagues though. They say things like "well why are you doing that?" I say, "I'm not just decorating the hall. There is a purpose to what I am doing".

(January 8, 2011)

While she did take the artwork down when she saw a parent comparing students, she felt pressure to fit into her colleagues' values. She displayed poetry and other work on the bulletin boards throughout the year, even though she spoke of the tension it caused her each time.

We read a book about snowflakes and how each one is different. It's about two pen pals who live on opposite sides of the world and one is trying to describe snow to the other who lives in a very hot country. It's about how beautiful each person is, like a snowflake. They each did the cutting, which seemed like busy work to me, and they each came up with a metaphor for a snowflake. The bulletin board looks arts and craftsy but there was process attached. The things they came up with were beautiful. "Snowflakes are like hugs from my grandma." But I am still going to ask my administrator why we have to do bulletin boards. And I am going to say I am stopping these bulletin boards. We are just going to stop. I'll tell how we share and how the parents are communicated with. But I am

going to stop the bulletin boards. Its busy work for me and I don't have that kind of time. I really don't. (January 8, 2011)

There were numerous points where her familial curriculum making, the familial curriculum making of the children in her classroom, and school curriculum making bumped against each other. Even though she felt like an outsider who could not ask questions, others did not see this in her. In the institutional world, she was the adult working with many children who each brought their stories to live by into the classroom. It was her role to know each child's story and how it might fit in relationship with all the other stories that shape school. Part of Anna's professional story and part of the institution's story of who she was included an expectation that she would navigate the intersections of multiple familial and institutional worlds. She experienced this as difficult because she did not feel her voice mattered equally within the institution or with parents as illustrated in the story about the bulletin board.

### **Returning to the Moment of World Travelling**

Exploring Anna's familial world awakened me to the complexity of what it meant for a beginning teacher to navigate a curriculum of lives<sup>8</sup> in school (Clandinin et al., 2006). Returning to the moment of world travelling, I try to imagine how she navigated the possibilities and limitations that arose when 32 children and their families met. I continue in my wonders about world travelling without answers, but with many questions about beginning teachers' evolving

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<sup>8</sup> Clandinin et al. (2006) refer to a curriculum of lives as teacher, learners, subject matter, and milieu engaged in dynamic interaction.

educative and mis-educative experiences in relation with their expanding professional stories to live by.

I was curious about what a beginning teacher might learn about herself when her Métis world collided with Eurocentric worlds. I wondered what Anna learned about herself when she encountered an aggressive parent. I wondered what Anna, a beginning teacher living a plotline of challenging a dominant cultural narrative, learned when she met a plotline of beginning teacher as less than knowledgeable and not having her questions welcomed. I wondered what the children learned from witnessing their parent and teacher travelling between each other's worlds or not. I wondered what parents learned about their own identity making when Anna invited them to travel to her world as a new professional and also to her familial world, which included Métis heritage. My wonderings opened space to see that Anna was integral to the relational connections between learners, subject matter, and milieu (Schwab, 1973), and that all of this was in relation to the many diverse familial stories that met in her Grade 4 classroom. One of her priorities was to create space for each child's perspective. She taught the children in her classroom that diverse perspectives included different ways of viewing the world. The story of the snowflake poems is an example of how she wove appreciation for diversity into classroom world making. At the same time, this aspect of the world they were making in the classroom did not apply to the children's families as not all families expected their children to be open to other people's worlds.

I think staff and parents don't really get me at Riverstone. Like, my sense of humour. Humour is part of how I cope with things. And this is a world view. So that's part of who I am. It's not the world view at Riverstone. I have five children who identify as First Nations peoples right now in a classroom of 26. The rest are from all over the world. So I have to be conscious every moment of world view. World view is on the tip of my tongue always. Not all staff and parents get that. (Research conversation, January, 2010)

Interactions with parents were sometimes places that did not leave room for more than one world. Anna's priority was to attend to children as diverse people, and she was challenged to negotiate the meeting of stories and find overlapping worlds. Not only did Anna see this as important for the children, but she also placed herself in this conception of diversity.

### **Possibilities for Reshaping Teacher Education: Personal Worlds Inform Practical Worlds**

As we approach the concern of high attrition rates for beginning teachers (Guarino et al., 2006; Ingersoll, 1999), educators must recognize and understand the connection between education and personal experience in the lives of beginning teachers—in their personal practical knowledge. Personal experience shaped Anna's practical knowledge.

In studying the experiences of beginning teacher participants, with particular attention to Anna's composition of professional stories to live by, I

understood her experiences in the institution of school were nested (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998) in stories of family and home. I wanted to understand her familial narratives within curriculum-making moments and how these interactions influenced a beginning teacher's professional identity making. I understood that people world travelled within a complex set of interactions. I also wanted to consider possibilities that respond to Anna's words: "University did not prepare me for this" (excerpt from research conversation with Anna on December 16, 2010). Perhaps what university did not prepare her for was the experience of conflicting worlds. While Anna learned how to develop lesson plans, day plans, and year plans at the university, she did not experience the long hours that she gave to planning for children. Through the university, Anna learned about the importance of engaging parents in the classroom but could not be prepared for the interaction of diverse worlds until she experienced them in the Christmas tree moment and the bulletin board moment. Is there a way for teacher candidates to negotiate educative situations in which worlds collide before their first position on the professional knowledge landscape? Perhaps first steps into new territory begin with telling stories of world travelling in university classrooms. Perhaps as teacher candidates are allowed to experience tension in the university classroom in both educative and mis-educative ways, they come closer to bumping worlds in their future classrooms. This is courageous work. In a competitive framework of scholarly achievement, purposeful vulnerability is not easy. Making sense of situations where individuals have been vulnerable to another's aggressive action

takes rigorous intellectual work. For the purposes of this study I define intellectual work to be heightened attention towards a situation one is trying to understand in relation to their continuity of experience. Anna made sense of tension from the midst of relationship to the place, subject matter, and people she was surrounded by using knowledge from experience in her personal life as well as what she learned in University. Still, her first experiences of vulnerability in the classroom caught her by surprise. Practicing Lugones's (1987) attitude of playfulness creates an alternative response to those first surprises. These first experiences are similar to being a foreigner in another culture. Anna was torn between different cultures. She had roots in her own stories to live by, and at the same time, wanted to be in the children's worlds. She could never really be at home, master the language, or understand the customs of a particular child's world, yet she eventually came to a kind of knowing in that place. She wanted to please the parents of the children in her classroom, yet she felt badly in the midst of a parent's aggression. Heilbrun (1999) referred to Cathy Davidson and her experience in Japan as an American foreigner where she experienced many a liminal state. The way she described wanting to fit in and at the same time knowing there would be times she would fail resonated with how I saw Anna experiencing life as a teacher negotiating intersecting worlds in her classroom. Embarrassing or painful moments, misunderstandings, conflicts, confusion, intensity, novelty, and surprise are part of the experience of being a foreigner.

How do colleagues, administrators, parents, and students encourage and empower beginning teachers' personal practical knowledge in the midst of life on a threshold and between diverse worlds? Heilbrun (1988) said that the definition of power is that one's voice matters. It is not the power that comes from a man with a big stick, but rather the validation of those around you who respect who you are and what you bring to the interaction. Power is having your voice matter.

Again, our habits of dealing with tension become significant when we think about empowering beginning teachers to claim their personal practical knowledge from the midst of bumping worlds. If we approach the first 4 years of a teaching career with recognition that it is a "state of necessary in-betweenness [that is] understood and valued" (Heilbrun 1999, p. 98), we make room for the voices of beginning teachers to matter. The first 4 years become a place that is "amidst, among, atwixt, rooted nowhere except in the realm of questioning, experiment and adventure, and as it questions everything, it uses what it finds befitting" (p. 98). It becomes a place where more experienced teachers must continue to have faith in beginning teachers as we continue to search for new ways of relating to each other in schools.

Anna's experiences offer possibilities for considerations in reshaping curriculum making in places of teacher education. Possibilities for future focus in teacher education include beginning with familial stories, acknowledging beginning teachers as knowledgeable people, turning away from a competitive framework, and travelling into each other's worlds with loving perception.

### **Beginning with familial stories.**

One possibility for future focus revolves around the need to concentrate primarily on the living and telling of complex narratives that beginning teachers bring with them. These complex narratives have been composed over time in particular places with particular people and within particular social and cultural worlds. Familial worlds shape the stories to live by beginning teachers bring into university as well as into their first teaching positions. Within a university class are a myriad of diverse worlds and stories to live by. Clandinin et al. (2011) suggested teacher educators focus on how relationships are negotiated between many diverse worlds.

One way we might reach toward this prospect is to draw upon the relational, multiperspectival possibilities that already, inherently, live in teacher education classrooms, that is, in the meeting of the diverse lives of teacher education, of teacher education students and teacher educators. In this reshaping of teacher education attentive to lives, we need to recognize future and practicing teachers, and ourselves, as “holders and makers of knowledge” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999b, p. 1), that is, of personal practical knowledge which threads into each of our identities, our stories to live by. (Clandinin et al., 2011, p. 37)

Focusing on relational work in teacher education requires a shift from curriculum as a plan to the lived curriculum (Aoki, 1993) as children, families, teacher education students, teachers, principals, teacher educators, and Ministry of



Education subject-matter mandates share space in teacher education classrooms. This new focus “might, necessarily, (dis) position or de-centre subject matter knowledge as dominant in teacher education programs” (Clandinin et al., 2011, p. 37). Instead of a focus on predetermined subject matter, the focus in teacher education requires an invitation to beginning teachers to be world travellers, learning to negotiate the many worlds that meet in their classrooms and learning to shift their own familial stories to live by as well as the stories that are community stories and stories about the place.

**Beginning teachers are knowledgeable people.**

A second possibility for focus in teacher education revolves around the need to recognize beginning teachers as knowledgeable people. In acknowledging that beginning teachers carry knowledge that is valuable, we begin to reshape the dominant story which currently

Position[s] teacher educators as holding superior or more valuable knowledge than teacher education students, principals as holding superior or more valuable knowledge than teachers, and all of us, teacher educators, teachers, and principals as holding superior or more valuable knowledge than children and families. In our imagined counter story, the personal practical knowledge woven into the stories to live by of each of us, children, families, teachers, principals, and teacher educators, would be valued in teacher education. (Clandinin et al., 2011, p. 38)

For Anna, the plotline of beginning teachers as knowledgeable people may have offered an interruption to her narrative of not good enough while embracing her for all she is as she composed her life in relation to school worlds and family worlds. Attending to beginning teacher personal practical knowledge over the first 4 years of their careers invites a perception of knowing them as knowledgeable people.

### **Turning away from a competitive framework.**

A third possibility for future focus in teacher education revolves around the need to turn away from assuming one world within a competitive framework. Winning, losing, and battling defeats the purpose of learning to create educative spaces for teachers and learners from places of confidence for each person. In competitive frameworks, arrogant perception shapes fear, which limits abilities to shift and grow. Alternatively, if we follow Lugones (1987), we see all others as knowers, and humbly work to understand how and what they know. We practice a form of loving perception. If we begin from the place of valuing an individual beginning teacher's knowledge, as well as valuing children's knowledge and their familial curriculum making, we are co-creating spaces of witnessing each other's worlds through each other's eyes. As multiple worlds open and interact, as people travel between each other's worlds, it is necessary to perceive the world lovingly and playfully (Lugones, 1987) instead of competing toward a standardized world.

### **Travelling into worlds with loving perception.**

How we position ourselves as teacher educators, researchers, administrators, experienced teachers, beginning teachers, and children with families raises questions of how we perceive each other within and between worlds. Questions of what responsibilities we have to each other are also at the forefront. If we choose to supervise and assess beginning teachers within a world of mentoring and induction into prescribed roles, we might risk a “failure to love” (Lugones, 1987, p. 7), which includes possibilities of ignoring who they are, ostracizing them from their experiences in their personal lives, rendering them invisible, stereotyping them, and leaving them completely alone. If we choose to sustain them as world travellers and negotiators of interactions between lives, there is room for making sense of the complexities that occur in the meeting. An attitude that sustains people in making sense in moments of meeting is a playful attitude (Lugones, 1987). In describing this attitude to facilitate world travelling, Lugones helps us imagine possibilities for a shift in our approach to teacher education.

Playfulness that gives meaning to our activity includes uncertainty, but in this case the uncertainty is an *openness to surprise*. This is a particular metaphysical attitude that does not expect the world to be neatly packaged. Rules may fail to explain what we are doing. We are not self-important, we are not fixed in particular constructions of ourselves, which is part of saying that we are *open to self-construction* . . . We are not worried about

competence. We are not wedded to a particular way of doing things.

While playful we have not abandoned ourselves to, nor are we stuck in, any particular “world.” *We are there creatively.* We are not passive.

(Italics in the original, Lugones, 1987, pp. 16–17)

In negotiating the complex lives that met in her classroom in a way that sustained her, Anna went through a process of creativity as she composed a story that made sense for her in both her professional world and her personal world. She began the process by recognizing her own stories that were situated in a particular world. From recognition of her own stories, she awakened to stories that were different from hers. As she struggled with the differences between stories, she recognized an opportunity to travel to someone else’s world. Accepting, rejecting, and navigating life between bumping stories was an important part of Anna’s experience. She did not feel university prepared her for these navigations. Navigating bumping stories was not simply about acceptance or rejection. Navigating bumping stories involved living with tension where differences and complexities held people together. Tension was part of making an identity from the midst of a whole life. World travelling began with recognizing which worlds she came from personally and what stories were told in those worlds. Seeking to understand the complexities of another’s world was part of the negotiation process that shaped Anna’s professional story to live by. Looking for common ground between bumping stories (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2003) required looking for familiarity between stories. As Bateson

(2000) reminds us, there is “familiarity hidden in the strange. We can look with curiosity and respect at the faces of men and women we have never met” (p. 3). Looking for the familiar hidden in the strange is part of any new beginning. Learning to travel into worlds where one cannot find familiarity is more difficult. Perhaps world travelling with a playful attitude is one way to find the narrow ridge<sup>9</sup> between Anna’s world and the world of Riverstone School. Perhaps world travelling to the narrow ridge is where our relational responsibility begins for both teachers at the beginning of their careers and for those involved with them institutionally.

The question of responsibility to beginning teachers is a question that must stay in the minds of those that surround them. Clandinin (2010) speaks about sustaining teachers through creating spaces that allow teachers to shift who they are rather than imposing fixed roles. She says

As researchers, teacher educators, and teachers, our work is not to create spaces that educate us for fixed identities, fixed stories to live by. It is to create teacher education spaces in which teachers can compose stories to live by that will allow them to shift who they are, and are becoming, as they attend to the shifting social contexts, to children’s youths’ and families’ lives as well as to shifting subject matter. (p. 281)

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<sup>9</sup> Earlier in the dissertation, I explain Clandinin and Connelly’s (1998) reference to Buber’s (1957) concept of the “narrow ridge,” where there is “no sureness of knowledge” but only a “certainty of meeting” (p. 247).

Creating spaces that allow teachers at the beginning of their careers to shift who they are as they attend to children and families in their classrooms requires teacher educators and others around them to question their responsibility and the ways we shape them.

By continuing to sustain our responsibility to individual beginning teachers, we continue to travel to their worlds with loving perception and simultaneously invite them to travel to ours. Loving beginning teachers, and in turn teaching beginning teachers to perceive lovingly, requires that we go into their worlds and see with their eyes. We must witness their sense of self through their own world and see the way the people they are bumping against are constructed in their world. It is also important that they learn to do the same in the worlds of others. In the space between beginning teachers and the stories of those they meet within the institutional story of school, it is not only *my* story and it is not only *their* story—it is *our* story. Fostering loving perception as world travelling between beginning teachers and the people they interact with in school is one possible response to the question, how do we begin telling someone that their world is not the only one?

## Chapter Five: Shaping a Professional Identity with Saving Stories

Lynne Driedger-Enns and M. Shaun Murphy

### Abstract

Beginning with the concept of “‘personal practical knowledge’ to emphasize the teacher’s knowing of a classroom” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 25), we understood Anna’s, the beginning teacher in this inquiry, professional experience to be tied to both personal knowledge and practical knowledge. As we listened to Anna tell stories of her experience, we wondered if schools were places that honoured and supported personal knowledge in early-career teachers’ lives. Our research wonder is framed by wondering how beginning teachers, by attending to both personal and practical knowledge and not one over the other, support their developing professional identities.

Anna experienced tensions as her personal knowledge bumped up against her experiences of practice in her classroom. She was able to negotiate this tension by referring to what we came to understand as saving stories (King, 2003). This use of saving stories supported her integration of the personal with the practical. Based upon Anna’s saved and saving stories, this inquiry explores the need for continuity of experience as a key to continuing identity formation and sustaining teachers at the beginning of their careers. This manuscript has been accepted for publication with Learning Landscapes.

## **Introducing Anna as a Knowledge Holder**

Science is a challenge. What I am expected to teach in the classroom is very different from how I would naturally want to teach. If I were up north with my grandma, we would be talking about the land. Talking to me about deer-hide tanning, she would really be talking about chemistry. But it wouldn't be "now we are studying chemistry" . . . no . . . it's about the land. And that would be my reference . . . it's how we explore.

(Research conversation, January 21, 2011)

Anna, the participant in this inquiry, is a woman in her second year of teaching elementary school in a western Canadian prairie province. She has a strong presence and positions herself as a knowledge holder in many ways, most often in relation to her family with many references to her grandmother. While she claimed her knowledge as a teacher, she also deeply questioned it when she came into situations of tension or uncertainty.

"Am I living my personal teaching philosophy? How can I matter? What is my greater purpose for doing this work?" (Research conversation, December 2010 to August 2011) Her questions were wonders about who she was rather than of what she knew. At the same time, it was who she was that was what she knew.

According to Anna she was different at work than she was when she was visiting her grandmother. There was tension when she tried to integrate her familial way of learning with school expectations of learning. She expected



stories that she told in her world of family to transfer into her stories about her work world of school.

One of our [familial and community based] forms of correction is making fun of people. Making fun, poking fun is part of aboriginal world view.

So that's part of who I am. It's not the world view at my school.

(research conversation, Anna & Lynne, January 21, 2011)

When stories from her personal world, such as the models of using humor to correct a child, did not transfer into her professional world, she experienced an interruption of her story to live by, which caused her tension. These stories of tension awakened us to her experience of identity making as an early-career teacher. We listened to stories she sustained and carried between her various worlds with Clandinin and Connelly's (1998) words in mind. They wrote that identities are

narrative constructions that take shape as life unfolds and that may, as narrative constructions are wont to do, solidify into a fixed entity, an unchanging narrative construction, or they may continue to grow and change. They may even be, indeed, almost always are, multiple depending on the life situations in which one finds oneself. (p. 25)

Anna's story to live by, her identity, was not a fixed entity but a shifting one as she struggled to align the personal with the practical in a coherent life story. Anna's embodied past knowledge that shaped her in both her personal and practical worlds unfolded as she sought to establish connections between them.

When I was with my grandmother in the summers everything was integrated with everything. But it's also because of that integrating piece that school is so foreign for Aboriginal people. How do I use integration the way I know it from my grandmother into a class of thirty? What does that look like? How do I integrate life and land into cement walls with all the clocks on the walls? I tried making pemmican the other day. I don't have time or money to that kind of thing every day. That comes out of my own pocket. But it was fun and it was a piece of life. When I am with my grandmother there isn't a document outlining the outcomes before we live them. (Research conversation, Anna & Lynne, February 3, 2011)

Anna was trying to find coherence between the knowledge she gained in her personal life and the knowledge that the history of school mandated she implement. The need for a coherent story to live by can be understood with reference to Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) way of thinking about narrative unity, in which they explain that "a continuum within a person's experiences . . . renders life experiences meaningful through the unity they achieve for the person . . . for narrative unities emerge from our past, bring about certain practices in the present, and guide us toward certain practices in our future" (p. 74). When Anna's narrative unity was interrupted, she experienced tension, and it became apparent for Anna that "narrative unities could interweave both conflicting and competing plotlines within" (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 154). To understand the tension she was feeling between the multiplicity of experiences in her personal

and practical worlds over time called for an active reflection by which she attempted to put the whole together. According to Carr (1986), “the most striking occasions for such reflections are those radical conversions . . . in which a new view of life, of oneself, and of one’s future projects requires a break with reinterpretation of one’s past” (pp. 75–76). Indeed, we wondered if this was happening for Anna. She was reflecting and reinterpreting her past ideas of what it meant to be a teacher brought to her attention by breaks in her narrative coherence. The stories of learning alongside her grandmother brought unity to this new revisioning of her professional identity. Through stories she told of her grandmother, she wove diverse experiences together in order to make sense of situations she did not understand.

### **The Story of Beginning Teachers in Research Literature**

Much of the literature about beginning teachers focuses on a deficit understanding of their experiences—of what they lack and therefore need to attain and develop coherent stories of themselves as teachers. Multiple theories describe teacher identity and the process of learning to teach as a movement through developmental stages (Fuller & Bown, 1975; Harrington & Sacks, 1984; Katz, 1972). Stages are viewed as distinct experiences in a hierarchy of phases from incomplete to whole. Fuller and Bown’s (1975) work is an example of explaining teacher identity as developmental stages. They suggested teachers moved through sequences of concern, which began with identifying with the pupil rather than as a teacher, moved to a concern for survival and a loss of their idealistic fantasy of

the teaching role, then toward concern for their teaching performance, and finally into concern for pupil learning as individuals with individual needs. These concerns were suggested as universal.

Existing research has also focused on tensions with the technical aspects of learning to teach with the aim of fixing a beginning teacher's problems. Perceived problems of beginning teachers (Veenman, 1984) were expressed as issues with classroom discipline, motivating students, dealing with differences, assessing student work, relationships with parents, and inadequate teaching resources. Early-career teacher attrition has been positioned "as a problem related to individual factors of burnout, resilience, personal demographics, and personal factors" or due to "contextual factors of support, salary, professional development, collaboration, nature of the context, student issues, and teacher education" (Schaefer et al., 2012, p. 106). Our approach as researchers to tension in an early-career teacher's life was different from previous research. Instead of perceiving problems to be smoothed over, we viewed tension as a necessary part of any new experience and realized it as indication for us to be awake and attentive to understand the experience (Clandinin et al., 2009).

The literature suggests reasons that teachers do not succeed in the first years of their teaching. As indicated previously, many "perceived problems of beginning teachers" lead to their departure from teaching—problems that beginning teachers might not be able to overcome and subsequently lead to a career shift. In our research it became clear to us that the integration of the

personal with the practical was necessary to sustain teachers during the beginning of their careers (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2011). According to Schaefer and Clandinin (2011), the shift from understanding ways we can retain teachers to ways we can sustain them in their careers is an essential shift in understanding.

### **Understanding Identity, Narratively**

For the purposes of this research, we use the term *stories to live by*, a narrative term for identity developed by Connelly and Clandinin (1999), which grew from the work of Dewey (1938), Schwab (1973), Polanyi (1962), and others. From Dewey comes the turn to experience as it is framed in continuity, interaction, and situation. Schwab concentrated Connelly and Clandinin's attention on the curriculum commonplaces of teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu, and Polanyi directed their study to focus on ideas of self. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) became "fascinated with trying to understand teachers as knowers: knowers of themselves, of their situations, of children, of subject matter, of teaching, of learning" (p. 1). Understanding identity became an endeavor to understand the way teachers thought, and as they explored teacher identity by listening to teachers tell stories about their experiences, they came to see teacher knowledge as a storied life composition. "These stories, these narratives of experience, are both personal—reflecting a person's life history—and social—reflecting the milieu, the contexts in which teachers live" (p. 2). They developed the narrative educational concept personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) as a way of understanding teacher knowledge, and in the

process, Connelly and Clandinin (1999) began to hear teachers asking questions of identity. Questions such as

“who am I in my story of teaching?”; “Who am I in my place in the school?”; “Who am I in children’s stories?”; “Who am I in my administrators’ stories?”; “Who am I in parents’ stories?” (p. 3)

They found teachers asking questions in terms of “who am I in this situation?” rather than “What do I know in this situation?” (p. 3). We heard Anna ask these same sorts of questions.

### **Narrative inquiry as methodology.**

Narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) was the research methodology that shaped this project to study Anna’s interactions as a beginning teacher. Foundational to this work is the assumption that

humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477)

People tell stories about experiences they have lived that affect meaning making in a present situation. People also tell stories that they hope to live in the future, while simultaneously living out present experience in the shape of a story related to possible futures. We formulate future stories as plans before we live

them, we live stories out in an interaction of many stories coming together, and we talk about experiences through stories after we have lived them, in an ongoing cycle. This temporal understanding of experience is one of the commonplaces of narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

From a methodological perspective, narrative inquiry is a research frame appropriate to the study of early-career teacher experience because of this focus on continuity within an experiential framework. Teachers are whole persons engaged in an ongoing cycle of “living, telling, retelling, and reliving” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 187) across social contexts in relation to others, in relation to institutional grand narratives, and in relation to their particular professional knowledge landscapes and cultures of teaching. Narrative inquiry focused us to think of the “continuity and wholeness of an individual’s life experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). This predisposition set the stage for us to suppose that a beginning teacher is whole and complete as he or she begins a new career, rather than carrying on traditions of developmental stages from insufficiency toward competency as research literature has suggested in the past (Fuller & Bown, 1975; Katz, 1972; Stroot et al., 1998). Instead of observing Anna moving through a hierarchy of developmental stages toward a fixed idea of the whole teacher, we viewed her unfolding identity—her story to live by—as fluid and story based, but already whole when she stepped into the classroom.

### *Methods.*

At the heart of this narrative inquiry and research text is ethical concern for the integrity of our representations of and best interests for Anna. Our methods for hearing Anna's stories were situated in relationship over time. Throughout the 2-year inquiry process, Lynne collected data through weekly research conversations that included informal talk about Anna's experiences as well as artifacts and collages that she brought with her at times to represent those experiences. One of us wrote field notes, typed transcripts of the conversations, and wrote reflections as interim texts. We met on a weekly basis to analyze field texts. As we reflected on field notes and transcripts in the writing of research texts, we saw moments when Anna was particularly animated due to particular tensions she was experiencing. We paid attention to what she was saying because of how she was saying it, and because her thoughts and responses recurred as narrative threads in research conversations, artifacts, and field notes.

Our inquiry into her stories was shaped by a three-dimensional conceptual framework. The "three commonplaces of narrative inquiry—temporality, sociality, and place—which specify dimensions of an inquiry space" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479) became our analytical tool for unpacking Anna's experience. Attending to the first commonplace, we moved inward, outward, backward, and forward (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in time with the stories that Anna told. We were mindful that her stories always had a past, a present, and a future.



The second commonplace that motivated our attention was sociality. Internal conditions, such as “feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral disposition” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480) were evident in the stories Anna told. Social conditions also called us to attend to the outward, external conditions around her, such as her students and professional colleagues, her family members, the culture of the institution she worked in, and other contextual factors.

The third commonplace is place. “The specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 481) was key to Anna’s experience on both her personal and professional knowledge landscapes. Each place she experienced on her personal landscape impacted and shaped who she was on her professional landscape.

Anna held onto particular stories as she pulled them across her experiences in her familial, personal, and professional places. We share particular tension-filled moments in this research text because of the way she told them, repeatedly, across her worlds and with passion. We came to understand these repeated tellings as saving stories.

### **Saving Stories as a Way of Framing Experience**

Throughout our two years of research conversations Anna told stories from her family, stories about the land, and stories about Métis heritage. These recurring story threads were pulled across Anna’s worlds as a way to sustain a coherent story to live by.

Shaping her narrative as a teacher were “saving stories” (King, 2003, p. 119). Thomas King wrote that the stories we believe influence the outcome of life. He says some stories we tell over and over, and these are our saving stories. These stories point to beliefs and shape lives. “I tell them to myself, to my friends, sometimes to strangers. Because they make me laugh. Because they are a particular kind of story. Saving stories, if you will. Stories that help keep me alive” (p. 119).

Telling personal saving stories became an intellectual, embodied, and deeply felt way for Anna to sustain herself on the professional knowledge landscape. The repeated telling of these stories reminded her of her beliefs, and as we listened to her scaffold meaning-making possibilities (Huber & Clandinin, 1994) for herself as a beginning teacher, we came to see how these saving stories shaped a way of understanding the personal in relation to the practical. Lopez (1990) speaks of the importance of stories as sustenance.

The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other’s memory. This is how people care for themselves. (p. 48)

The saliency of this reference is in our understanding that the stories Anna told were the stories she held in her own memory, that in her telling of them she was caring for herself. Attending to the multiplicity of Anna’s stories from her

personal world, we saw particular saving stories that she returned to when she found herself in the midst of tension in her professional world. We saw multiple recurring personal stories shaping her emerging professional stories. In what follows, we describe three entangled saving stories that show something of who Anna was in her personal world and who she was becoming in her professional world. We begin our unpacking of the research with attention to ways familial stories shaped her professional stories to live by.

**Familial saving stories.**

Anna's passion for bringing life into subject matter on her professional knowledge landscape with children dwelt on a personal foundation where everything was in relation. This foundational way of being was nurtured by her grandmother was a way of making sense of the world.

In the presence of my grandmother, I shift from teacher to learner. She isn't explicit in her teaching. Just because she is, she teaches. She is present. She is present in her own life. Present in relation to the land. Simply being in her presence, I am learning. (Research conversation, Anna & Lynne, July 9, 2011)

Our view of knowledge that originates within a family comes out of the work of Huber et al. (2011), who suggest that "familial curriculum making" is a term used to refer to the negotiated process that one grows up with as a member of a family. It is the making of a course of life that is "relationally composed in children's home and community places" (p. 2).

Referring back to the first story in this paper, we see how Anna's internal narrative about how to teach science was shaped by an experience with her grandmother as they learned about science in relation to the land that they lived on together. Learning outside, alongside her grandmother, was how she learned to explore. There was an openness to what the day presented, rather than the assertion of a prescribed set of outcomes. Tanning hides, which can be understood in a Western world view as chemistry, was the subject matter that positioned Anna as learner and her grandmother as teacher, and all in relation to the land in a process of exploration.

Because of this familial way of making sense, curriculum in her classroom was co-composed (Clandinin et al., 2006) in the living of relationship while still maintaining the understanding that the government curriculum document, written by others outside the classroom, was important to her work. Daily, she wrote up to four lesson plans for a particular lesson so that all the needs in her classroom aligned with government-mandated outcomes and indicators. She did this to mediate her anxiety and to fit into the institutional story. Yet, in the safety of the research space, she spoke freely about the curriculum guide as a legal document that bound her "like a ball and chain" (Research conversation, 2010). She spoke of reporting periods and standardized testing that got in the way of good teaching and learning, an understanding of teaching and learning shaped alongside her grandmother. She spoke passionately of curriculum co-composed in relationship,

as her grandmother taught her, and imagined herself in relationship with the children she taught.

**Saving stories about the land.**

As a young child in the midst of a life of numerous relocations, one place clearly stood out as home for her. Home was a place where she knew the contour of the land and the sound of the trees.

The only place on Earth that I consider home is up north, in northern Alberta. My grandmother's old homestead is still in the family and still when I round that bend . . . ah . . . that is home. I lived there for a short time. I don't remember it consciously much, but it's still home and I don't know why . . . just bush on either side. Evergreens . . . no poplar trees . . . and just peace. It's like, I'm home. (Research conversation, Anna & Lynne,, December 2010)

This personal understanding of place shaped her personal knowledge landscape, and she spoke of it frequently over time in our research conversations. When she carried the knowledge of this place into her professional world, it collided violently with rows of desks, textbooks, and institutional cement walls. Anna's saving stories tied her various personal and professional worlds together with a sense of unity and purpose.

For Anna, it made sense to her to be outside, learning in relation to the land. She returned to this story frequently in research conversations.

The closer I get to home, I feel things shedding. The closer I get to that homestead and my grandmother, I feel myself shedding Western values.

(Research conversation, Anna & Lynne,, July 9, 2011)

Situated learning experiences in nature were clearly important to Anna. However, the institutional story privileged learning that occurred within classroom walls. The walls detached her from making sense of how the world is understood through land-based experiences. Technical aspects of teaching including outcomes and indicators, rows of desks with the teacher at the front of the classroom, and the search for a textbook became her focus, and she felt pushed into a box where she shaped a professional knowledge of teaching with little reference to her personal understandings. Crites (1971) warned of abstraction and contraction as strategies of modern times. He explained that images and qualities are “detached from experience to become data for the formation of generalized principles and techniques. Such abstraction enables us to give experience a new non-narrative and a temporal coherence” (p. 308). As Anna became detached from her internal narrative that included learning outside, she felt her identity shifting toward that of a technician. In the above excerpt of transcript, when she said she “felt herself shedding western values”, she is not meaning that she abandoned the technical aspects of teaching. Rather she is making space alongside the institutional story for her personal stories related to Métis heritage and her grandmother’s ways. She shaped her classroom experience of teaching with the story of her grandmother’s teachings in

relationship to the land, and what she had learned from her grandmother about human relationships. Her grandmother's ways of teaching were based in relationship and deep respect for the person she was with. Anna created this relational sense between children and herself in the classroom.

If I am present in my teaching it comes out looking like passion but what it really is, is a deep relational sense for human beings. This passion for human beings doesn't stop at the four walls of a school. It is part of my world outside the classroom too. How can I be like my grandma in four cement walls? It's a question I ask myself each day when I am planning for my students. (Research conversation, Anna & Lynne, July 9, 2011)

#### **Métis heritage as saving story.**

In Anna's classroom, a relational space for diversity was important. She honoured diverse world views of her students and was attentive to the conversations between them in their classroom curriculum making and life writing. Balancing life writing (Huber et al., 2011), both hers and the children's, with curriculum documents was a tension for Anna.

This attention to diversity was due in part to her experience within Métis culture and a prairie province with a history of residential schools, a reservation system, and treaty benefits dependent on cultural status identification. Her cultural identity as a Métis woman growing up between two cultures meant she was familiar with living on the boundaries and, therefore, sensitive to issues of marginalization and belonging.

Thinking about the way the curriculum document addresses Aboriginal and Métis perspective, another mandate that is written in the curriculum guide, but in our lived curriculum we are still living racism. Then in the written document we are supposed to somehow treat this Métis perspective as part of subject matter. I have to find a way to integrate Aboriginal perspective, from these resources that represent the heartbeat of Métis peoples, find a way to “fit” it into the curriculum. How do you fit a people’s heartbeat into that curriculum? And that curriculum document is part of a legalistic world. I keep hearing the voice of my administrator saying, “It’s a legal document.” A legal document. It cements your footing, and you are no longer mobile or fluid. How can I, [a Métis woman], belong to that? (Research conversation, Anna & Lynne, July 2011)

She was also sensitive to the ways distinctions made an *us* and *them* border between people and what it meant to her, as a Métis person, to identify with both. Her Métis stories to live by were shaped in this understanding of life in a border culture. As Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) wrote:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line. A narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a



constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (p. 25)

For Anna, this constant state of transition was sometimes represented in a story she had been telling all her life as she explained how her “restlessness” (Research conversation, Anna & Lynne, December 2010) began with moving before Grade 1 and then often over her life as a child, youth, and young adult. This experiential story of moving shaped her feeling of restlessness as a teacher and caused her to consider leaving teaching. The telling of an exit story shaped by many transitions made her safe because she knew she could always leave.

I’m restless. I’m restless already and this is year two. I have three out of four years of a CGA, two out of three years of a B.A., one out of two years of a business admin thing. I just get sick of it or else I get enough of it so that I can get by and then I quit or get kicked out. I am seriously thinking about leaving teaching and going into medicine. (Research conversation, Anna & Lynne, December 20, 2010)

Anna had a strong sense of transitions—transitions from place to place, but also from story to live by to story to live by. These stories of identity continued to be told over time. She carried her saving stories of transition from her personal knowledge landscape onto the professional knowledge landscape.

Early in the research, Anna expressed a saving story out of her personal world that expressed the way she felt about being Métis.

I don't know much about that [my First Nations heritage], but I do know about being Métis. We are people stuck in the middle. We don't know who the hell we are. When you have strong Catholic roots and First Nations influence, it's a messed up, messed up scene. We are the kings and queens of identity crises, I am sure. And because of my fair skin, I get to hear how people really feel about life within diversity. [When my friends from school came to the house], I used to hide my mukluks and moccasins and was always embarrassed of my family from the north . . . I'd say, "Oh, sorry, can't play!" (Research conversation, Anna & Lynne,, December 20, 2010)

In August 2011, during the summer after her third year of teaching, Anna spoke differently about what it meant to be Métis living between cultures. She was thinking about diversity in her classroom, of which she was a part, as a teacher when she said, "We grow in spaces of uncertainty. We grow when spirit or world view come into tension with uncertainty. Spaces of uncertainty draw on my Métis and spiritual identity in my life experience" (research conversation, Anna & Lynne,, August 2011). Although she continued to tell a saving story of Métis identity, over time her perspective toward the borderlands and how she lived out that story in her classroom had changed—her professional knowledge was shifting. She no longer held a negative judgment over uncertainty and transition, but rather saw this space of tension as a growth-oriented endeavor.

With her personal saving story of living as a Métis woman, a professional story of making space for diversity in school was forming.

I am Métis. I know what it is like to feel different. I have five children who identify as First Nations peoples right now in a classroom of 26. The rest are from all over the world. So when I say to my learners “you need to be careful of the choices you make for today because you might not get a chance to redo today,” well in some world views that’s not true. So I have to be conscious every moment of world view. World view is on the tip of my tongue always—in every subject. (Research conversation, Anna & Lynne, January 21, 2011)

She maintained narrative coherence through her personal and practical knowledge as she told us how “world view is on the tip of my tongue always.”

Another saving story that remained fixed while shaping a professional story to live by in flux had to do with place. Her grandparent’s homestead in northern Alberta shaped a learning space for her, and as she told this story of place over and over, it shaped her professional knowledge of space. She said,

There is something about four walls that isn’t organic. Those walls put pressure to *become* quickly. Those four walls have got to go. How can you be like I am with my grandma in those four walls? They need to be dismantled. (Research conversation, Anna & Lynne, July 2011)

In the act of claiming this knowledge about physical space from her personal life as having an impact on her professional life, a story to live by on her professional knowledge landscape shifted.

It is the story of [students'] lives that is a space of passion. This passion for human beings doesn't stop at the four walls of a school. It is outside the classroom too. Passion is presence . . . a way of being in the world.

(Research conversation, Anna & Lynne, July 2011)

Saving stories helped her articulate the common thread running through her stories to live by. "Passion is to be present. That presence, that feeling between you, you know its passion. If I am present in my teaching, it comes out looking like passion, but what it really is, is a deep relational sense for human beings" (research conversation, Anna & Lynne, July 2011).

Anna, in the research conversation space, was able to articulate passion as a story to live by that sustained her on her professional knowledge landscape.

Passion happens with the heart beat . . . between two or more people's heartbeats. Relationships and course of life are not two dimensional, and heartbeat sustains that multidimensional space. (Research conversation,

Anna & Lynne, July 2011)

In our work with Anna, we came to an understanding of the role of saving stories. Initially we understood these stories as literally saving her, that in the retelling of them she maintained a coherent sense of self in relation to her shifting, uncertain, professional story to live by. However, as we stayed close to the idea

of a saving story, we began to see them in ways that are more complex. While we still consider them a way of saving herself, we now also understand them as quite literally a story you save. This reminded us of the things we save that are important to us. The things we keep to hold again, to remind us of a moment, a place, or a person. Sometimes we intentionally take them out, like the mukluks Anna kept that were stitched by her grandmother, and sometimes we happen upon that saved thing by chance and become caught up in the memory of it.

Saving stories functioned like this for Anna. Sometimes they were stories she intentionally told to maintain a coherent narrative of herself on a new landscape—the professional knowledge landscape of teaching. Sometimes she told her saving stories because she had saved them, like one might save an artifact in a memory box (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). When retelling a story she had saved, she was reminding herself of another way of being, of a moment alongside her grandmother on the land.

## **Conclusion**

We echo Thomas King's (2003) words for each of us to pay attention. We must pay attention as we walk alongside early-career teachers in hopes of sustaining them in their teaching identities.

When an early-career teacher tells us their saving stories, we remember Thomas King's (2003) words about a story when someone shares it: "You can have it if you want . . . Just don't say in the years to come that you would have lived *your* life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now"

(p. 167). Now we have heard Anna's stories. What we do with them matters. All beginning teachers have saving stories. What we do with them matters.

The current learning landscape does not provide many spaces for beginning teachers to tell and understand their saving stories. Our research opens spaces for conversations about implications for new teacher in-services and pre-teacher education. The following are touchstones for teaching beginning teachers to engage as narrative inquirers into their saving stories.

In our research alongside Anna we became aware that beginning teachers need a space for conversation. Anna drew our attention to the importance of asking them who they are and where they come from. This means creating safe spaces where beginning teachers may tell stories of who they are and speak freely about the tensions they experience when their stories to live by collide with people and situations in school. We became conscious of the ways that experienced teachers and beginning teachers initiate relationships with each other that allow them both to play their saving stories forward into their lives in schools. We attended to how we might create an openness to learning to let go of some saving stories as beginning teachers incorporate new knowledge into their practical knowledge. This is not mandated or forced knowledge, but rather an organic moving forward in educative ways. The first years as a teacher are not something to quickly move through. Rather, let those first years be a place where we dwell in questions, and live in the midst of wonder and uncertainty in a Maxine Greene (1995) spirit of "forever on the way".

We end this manuscript with Anna's words that illustrate her experience with the research conversations.

Last time we got together I got in my car and I was singing. I haven't done that for a long time. What are all those other beginning teachers doing out there who don't have someone like you. How do they get through this? I feel like we get together and I spew it all out there and then I can walk out into my same life differently. (Research conversation, Anna & Lynne, December 20, 2010)

## **Chapter Six: Shaping a Relational Identity**

### **Abstract**

The following chapter explores a beginning teacher's growing professional identity as she interacts as a substitute teacher with children in classrooms. Central to the exploration of her experience are the tensions of interruptions to the expectations she had for herself as a teacher which leave gaps in her identity. The incoherencies in her practice are examined as she negotiates her professional life over 2 years. I represent these tensions through narratives of particular moments as well as through word images to describe the intersections of diverse lives in a school. The complexity of substitute teaching is situated in school and classroom contexts, attending to the interwoven nature of work with colleagues and children. Because many beginning teachers enter the profession as substitute teachers, issues of sustaining and developing professional identity are central to this work. A peer reviewed journal, *Teacher Education Quarterly*, has accepted the following manuscript/chapter for publication.

### **Relational Identity Making on the Professional Knowledge Landscape as a Substitute Teacher: Interruptions and Continuities**

#### **Introducing the Research Puzzle**

This chapter focuses specifically on a young woman, Penny,<sup>10</sup> who worked as a substitute teacher after she graduated from a 2-year teacher education

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<sup>10</sup> Penny is a pseudonym, as are all names throughout the paper. This is done as an ethical consideration for protecting the privacy of the participant and those she speaks of in research conversations.



program at her local university. For Penny, substitute teaching was an interruption as she shaped a professional life, moving toward a full-time permanent contract in a western Canadian urban school division. Although she yearned for a permanent contract, Penny's many experiences as a substitute teacher helped her learn what she wanted and what she did not want in her identity as a professional.

### **Relational Identity Making: Composing a Professional Story to Live By**

My inquiry began with questions about teacher identity, understood narratively as their stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999a) at the beginning of a career. I wondered about the stories that beginning teachers lived alongside their families and communities and how these stories differed from and shaped the ones they lived at school. Each teacher brought stories from their lives outside of school into their experiences with children in the classroom. These stories sometimes shifted in relation to who they met in their classrooms. Children sometimes shape who the teachers are. Murphy (2007) described a similar experience between the teacher and children in his research:

The teacher as a knower of children experienced shifts in her story to live by as she encountered the knowledge of the children; therefore the children were also scaffolding shifts for the teacher. An added dimension is how knowers know themselves by how they are known by others; this both influences their identity composition and the curriculum they are shaping. (p. 110)

Children and teachers create their stories to live by within relationship to each other. Their knowledge is nested in each other's knowledge. This nested knowledge shapes relational identity making. As Murphy (2007) writes, "Nested knowledge refers to how knowers know knowers" (p. 110). Relational identity making in this paper refers to the stories that a teacher composed about who she was in relation to the children she met in classrooms. Each person, including the teacher, brought stories into their curriculum-making space from their lives outside the classroom, which intersected with the stories of others in that place.

The spaces of curriculum making, where children's and teachers' lives in motion meet (Huber et al., 2011), hold complex layers of identity making, because each individual contributes to the negotiation of learning together.

Exploring Penny's stories to live by on the professional knowledge landscape furthers an understanding of how her experience was shaped, but also

develop[s] understandings of children as developing and living out their own shifting and multiple stories to live by, stories shaped by their knowledge and context. In this view we draw attention to the narrative life compositions of children, a view that allows us to see children as shaped by, and shaping their contexts. (Huber & Clandinin, 2005, p. 314)

This notion of children shaping their own contexts illuminated the way children shape a beginning teacher's story to live by. The children Penny taught were significant in her identity-making experience.

One place where the intellectual work of teachers can be studied is in the moment where teachers' and children's lives interact as they meet in schools. Intellectual work is an embodied narrative that has grown from life experience which helps a teacher make sense of particular situations. It is a way of thinking with stories that were formed as models from which to live from. Making sense of a situation from the midst of a personal plotline involves an interaction between people and their stories to live by. This interaction can be understood as curriculum making, a concept that has grown out of the work of Clandinin and Connelly (1992), who believe that curriculum "might be viewed as an account of teachers' and children's lives together in schools and classrooms . . . in which teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu are in dynamic interaction" (p. 392). Lives are shaped in and out of schools. Children and teachers bring their lived experiences from outside school into the classroom where their lives meet and where they inquire into and negotiate learning together. This view of lives together in a classroom shaped their "vision of curriculum as a course of life" (p. 393). Understanding curriculum making as an account of teachers' and children's lives together opens a place for researchers and educators to focus on teachers' integral role amid a negotiated experience with others. In this view of curriculum making, the children's experiences in the classroom and out of the classroom influence a teacher's professional story to live by.

## **Shaping a Professional Story to Live By Inside and Outside the Classroom**

In the same way a child's knowledge is shaped inside and outside the classroom, so too is a teacher's professional knowledge shaped inside and outside the classroom. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) describe in-classroom and out-of-classroom places as metaphorical spaces where a teacher's professional knowledge is shaped.

Teachers spend part of their time in classrooms and part of their time in other professional, communal places. These are two fundamentally different places on the landscape: the one behind the classroom door with students and the other in professional places with others. Teachers cross the boundary between these places many times each day. (p. 25)

They suggest in-classroom places to be safe places. For Penny this was not consistently her experience, because she crossed boundaries and stepped into in-classroom places that were in different schools and classrooms each day. Some days she felt the scrutinizing eyes of the absent teacher who would be returning and experienced students who were disrespectful. The classroom she was in one day was also a classroom experience that shaped the next classroom she would be in the following days.

An out-of-classroom place is described as "a place filled with knowledge funneled into the school system for the purpose of altering teachers' and children's classroom lives" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25). As a substitute teacher and as a beginning teacher, Penny was not frequently part of these out-of-

classroom places, but nevertheless she was shaped by them. When she was, she did not question what was “coming down the pipe” as teachers with tenured contract positions do.

Teachers express their knowledge of out-of-classroom place as a place littered with imposed prescriptions. It is a place filled with other people’s visions of what is right for children. Researchers, policy makers, senior administrators, and others, using various implementation strategies, push research findings, policy statements, plans, improvement schemes, and so on down what we call the conduit into this out-of-classroom place on the professional knowledge landscape. (p. 25)

Although Penny was aware of power imbalances between policy makers and practitioners, she was not prepared to challenge the institutional stories coming down the conduit at the risk of appearing noncompliant to those with hiring capabilities. In some situations, she felt teachers had put her in the out-of-classroom place as one of the “others” with a vision of what was right for children.

Clandinin and Connelly (1996) speak of out-of-classroom places as places where a smooth story of life in the classroom is told:

When teachers move out of their classrooms into the out-of-classroom place on the landscape, they often live and tell cover stories, stories in which they portray themselves as experts, certain characters whose teacher stories fit within the acceptable range of the story of school being lived in

the school. Cover stories enable teachers whose teacher stories are marginalized by whatever the current story of school is to continue to practice and to sustain their stories to live by. (p. 25)

Penny's telling of cover stories in out-of-classroom places in the given ways were limited. The transient nature of substitute teaching does not allow shaping out-of-classroom relationships with other teachers in the same way permanent contract teachers are able to. As teachers talk together, reflecting on imposed policies and visions from others, they are making sense of tensions these impositions release.

Much of Penny's frustration came from impositions on her as a substitute teacher that limited her ability to negotiate curriculum with children over time. Her sense making of tension-filled experiences took place in personal places such as conversations with her mother, who had also been a teacher. Making sense of situations at school included intellectual work she did with her mother, a person on her personal knowledge landscape who had been part of shaping the personal knowledge she carried with her into the classroom.

As she reflected on her practice with her mother, her personal practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988) expanded and was carried into other professional stories to live by. Making sense with her mother in places outside of school frequently turned her perspective of a situation from mis-educative to educative experience. Her mother, with whom she had these reflective conversations, helped her make sense in ways that sustained her as a teacher.

Personal practical knowledge making happened through reflection on practice in out-of-school places for Penny.

### **Personal Practical Knowledge Making**

Personal practical knowledge refers to knowledge that is influenced by both personal out-of-school life and professional in-school life. While Penny lived as a teacher, she continued to lead her personal life in school. The personal aspect of personal practical knowledge is more than experiences that occur outside school. Personal knowledge is connected to a continuous plotline that each individual lives, which is carried into school. Personal and practical knowledge are entwined. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) described personal practical knowledge as “that body of convictions and meanings, conscious or unconscious that have arisen from experience (intimate, social, and traditional) and that are expressed in a person’s practices” (p. 7). Personal practical knowledge is “imbued with all the experiences that make up a person’s being. Its meaning is derived from, and understood in terms of a person’s experiential history, both professional and personal” (Clandinin, 1985, p. 362). Attending to both aspects of personal practical knowledge, the personal and the professional, provides an understanding of how a beginning teacher initiates a professional life. What Penny experienced in her personal life influenced what she experienced as a teacher in her classroom. She was engaged as a whole person in the midst of making a life. In this way, early-career teachers can be viewed “as more than trends and tendencies, more than graduates from particular programs and more

than just beginning teachers” (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2011, p. 277). Penny experienced tension as her story to live by emerged in the trends and tendencies of school places. Her knowledge from family places, university places, and places in between bumped against the dominant narrative of schools that shaped her substitute teaching.

The term *dominant narrative* refers to the story of schools that is “unfolding across western Canada into the experiences of children, families, and teachers in an era of growing standardization and achievement testing at a time when the lives of children, families, and teachers are increasingly diverse” (Huber et al., 2011, p. 1). Penny stepped into this professional milieu as a substitute teacher. She wanted to create a classroom as a place of inquiry rather than that of workbook pages, where children with diverse physical, intellectual, social, and emotional abilities gathered, rather than places that separated children into special ability groupings with resource room teachers. She accepted the dominant narrative of standardization and achievement testing as part of her role as teacher; yet it was not a story to live by in her own identity making as a beginning teacher. Rather, the prevailing story to live by for her as a teacher was about interactions between people in a school classroom where each come to school with lives outside the classroom that have shaped them through experience over time. Knowing her students as whole people and co-composing classroom community based on relationship was a significant aspect in her philosophy. In her experiences in pre-Kindergarten, she spoke about children who were not ready for



school. She met children whose speech and language reminded her of how babies played with sound. Putting ski pants on by themselves was far from what they could do. She understood these children as not being ready for school because their lives outside of school had not yet prepared them. She looked at the whole child in relation to what they experienced at home and how that affected their experience at school (Field notes, January 24, 2011).

Like her students, Penny also came to the classroom with knowledge derived from experiences outside school. These personal and practical stories sometimes became counter to plotlines in schools. When personal and practical stories collide with the dominant narrative of school, with the narratives of others, and with the narratives of the self, an individual's story is interrupted. I have foregrounded these moments of collision in Penny's life as a substitute teacher to understand how these experiences shaped an early-career teacher's identity making.

In this chapter, I have detailed a narrative account of Penny, based on field texts, to offer a glimpse into her personal and professional identity making, shaped by university and personal experiences outside school. Then I turn to one moment of curriculum making where she negotiated a curriculum of diverse lives, which takes us into her lived experience as a substitute teacher. Exploring this moment highlights her ways of making sense of who she was in a particular experience that carried tension for her. Next, I use word images to show how others around her—students, other teachers, and educational assistants—were

influential in shaping her unfolding identity as a teacher. Drawing on these narratives, I have highlighted a sense of the complexity in moments where lives meet and raised questions about the experiences of substitute teachers in such moments.

### **Penny's Professional Story to Live By: A Narrative Account**

After graduating from the Faculty of Education in the top academic 10 percent of her class, Penny hoped to obtain a full-time, permanent contract in the prairie city where she had completed her degree. She wanted to be hired only in this particular city and expected to have full-time, permanent work within the first few months of graduation as part of her continuing story of success. However, this did not happen. Her story of success was interrupted as she worked as a substitute teacher for 2 years after receiving her teaching certificate. For Penny, this interruption was not “educative” (Dewey, 1938), and she felt frozen in a blurred space between her identity as student and identity as teacher.

As Penny negotiated her first years as a substitute teacher, she told tension-filled stories in her personal community and asked questions of her experiences at schools: Which table to sit at in the staffroom for lunch? How to write a resume? If I quit my second job, will I be able to pay for rent and groceries?

After 2 years of subbing, she mourned an identity she had not yet been able to live. She said she was not yet a real teacher because she had not had a class of her own. However, she clung to her single story of what a real teacher

was and set a deadline for obtaining the elusive continuing contract. Within the midst of her composing an identity as a teacher, stories of staying and leaving competed. She decided that if she did not have a full-time, permanent contract within the year, she would leave teaching to look for another career path.

### **Exploring a Moment of Relational Identity Making in Curriculum**

Our research conversations took place once a week over a period of 2 years. I collected conversation transcripts, field notes, artifacts, and portfolio documents that I analyzed to understand Penny's experience. Reading through the field texts, threads of identity making became visible. I chose the following moment for this research text because it was filled with tension between diverse lives that met in a classroom. This moment, with Penny as a beginning substitute teacher and with students who claimed a regular teacher, along with subject matter and milieu in dynamic interaction, offers a situation in which to explore the complexity of negotiating a curriculum of lives on the professional landscape. In this transcript, Penny is speaking in first person, and the *I* refers to Penny.

I was requested to teach the remedial math and things like that, and I did not have any EA support for most of it. Some of [the students] are not designated but they should be. They were kind of mean. Just difficult kids. [It seemed there was an accepted] higher tolerance for misbehaviour [in their classroom]. A lot of things fly by because teachers have to pick their battles. There is a little boy, Austin, who is just really hard. And I talked to his teacher from last year and she said, "Oh I hated him. Defiant

and rude. Won't be quiet. If I am trying to talk, he is talking over me constantly. Saying rude things to other kids."

One morning [when I was subbing] he came in saying rude things and I wrote his name on the board. He was the first one [to come into the classroom] that day. He was saying, "This is bullshit." So I said, "You have to go to the principal's office." And he said, "You are racist," and ran out of the classroom. And I was just . . . that was the hundredth thing . . . you are just a difficult kid sometimes. Then I had those same kids the next day and taught them art and gym, and it was wonderful. [It was a] totally different atmosphere. It's just so often I feel like I'm being mean all day. I don't like that. I don't want to be that. But you are kind of forced to be that. It was kind of wow, all I've done all day is "Be quiet. Sit down. Open your book. Blah, blah, blah." Just naggy all day. I think it just got to me. 'Cause I'm working so hard and trying so hard I just want a contract so that I can go in [to my own classroom] every day and be really in this. Right now, I feel like I put on a kind of a façade, and it's emotionally draining when kids are mean to you. I don't go in there to be mean and make their life difficult. I want to make a positive difference.

(Research conversation, January 17, 2011)

This moment raises questions about how children and teachers negotiate an experience filled with tension in relationship with each other. The lives of children, their substitute teacher, their classroom teacher (although he or she is

absent), an educational assistant, other teachers, in a specific situation, in a particular milieu, met in this particular moment of curriculum making.

Unpacking this moment, while attending to tension and uncertainty that happens in curriculum making, helped me understand the complexities of a particular substitute teacher's experience. Math was the mandated subject matter in which these particular lives met on the first day, and visual art and physical education were the focus the second day. Math was taught with students seated in their desks, working independently from a textbook, while visual art and physical education were inquiry processes involving collaborative participation in physically engaged ways. Penny saw it as her duty to sustain as best she could the mandated curriculum that the regular teacher had left, although she longed to open a space for inquiry in which children could explore in ways she had learned at the university and in her internship.

In both the living and telling of the moment, the tension is evident. The first tension emerged around the teacher who had taught the boy the year before, whom she "hated" because of his behaviours of defiance and rudeness. This comment bumped violently with Penny's belief that as a teacher, unconditional positive regard was sustained through ethical commitment to a professional identity as teacher. When she felt herself moving away from a loving perception (Lugones, 1987) in her response to children, she experienced tension and made sense of this feeling as not being her story to live by. It was the story that was being lived, but it was not the story she told of herself. Although she felt tension

about how that plotline was positioning children when the previous year's teacher was unable to hold the student in a space of positive regard, Penny's own responses were abrupt, and she did not know how to shift the boy's behaviour in any other way except to send him to the administrator. Each day felt like the first day of school for her as she set her boundaries and groundwork for curriculum making in relationship—curriculum making as a “dynamic interaction among persons, things and processes” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 7).

Penny expended enormous effort on a daily basis to develop respectful relationships with new groups of children to shape an open space for curiosity and creativity. The second day, when the subject matters were visual art and physical education, both the children and Penny experienced a day together as an expression that fit Penny's hopes for in-class curriculum making shaped by relationship. Penny, as their teacher, welcomed spaces for curiosity. When remedial math was the subject matter, Penny saw fewer spaces to engage in curriculum making together. Children were labeled as needing remediation because standardized testing loomed. The view of math as a more controlled subject matter allowed less space for Penny to teach the way she wanted to.

Another moment of tension emerged as Penny lived and told the story of a place bound together by locks and keys. Neither Penny nor her students had free access to all places in the school that are typically available to the school community. Doors to the staff washroom, staff room, classrooms, equipment rooms, and other places in the school were locked. On the days when Penny had

to borrow keys from other teachers, or the day when a key for the sound system went missing from her key ring, tension ran high.

Continuities and interruptions, silences and invisibilities shaped Penny's story to live by as lives met, and in this meeting found expression in her practice. She did not question the dominant story of the regular contract teacher as expert and the story of substitute teacher and children as receivers of knowledge. Yet, the interruptions in her story of herself when she responded abruptly to children instead of with positive regard raised tension for her. She felt powerless because she had no way to make herself heard in ways she thought would shift this feeling. Her silence came from a sense of her own invisibility in the planned curriculum and lived curriculum (Aoki, 1993). At the same time, her ability to improvise was bound by the grand narrative of mandated objectives left for the substitute teacher to supervise rather than an opportunity to create space for inquiry in relational curriculum making. She felt invisible to those who do the hiring for full-time contracts, although she thought she was doing all the right things.

Looking at the possibilities that Penny brought into the classroom, her enthusiasm for inquiry-based learning and loving perception (Lugones, 1987) founded on relational curriculum making with children, I wondered how we could re-imagine this situation as more attentive to the lives of children and their substitute teacher. To do this I say something about the lives of those surrounding the situation.

## **Interruption and Continuity of Relationship in the Moment**

In the lives that met in the curricular moment described earlier, neither Penny's nor the children's stories to live by were known by the other. Over daily interaction together, students had created a web of relationships between each other to include their regular teacher and knowledge of each other's personal lives. Murphy (2004) wrote about relational knowing in a classroom as a web. Woven into a classroom web are personal stories to live by of each person in the classroom. Penny's presence as teacher interrupted this classroom web making. Penny did not know what had happened in the boy's life at home before he came to school that morning, and the boy did not know the experiences Penny was having. They did not know each other's stories to live by that in-school and out-of-school experiences shaped prior to their meeting. Part of Penny's story to live by included wanting to attend to children's lives. Yet, this was their first meeting. It was Penny's first time in their classroom, but it was not the first day in that classroom for the children. The students had already established lives together, and Penny's role as substitute teacher interrupted their continuity. The children did not acknowledge Penny's stories to live by, and this not knowing interrupted her continuity. When her continuity was interrupted each day, it was difficult for Penny to compose and sustain a story to live by. What happens in a classroom is "part of a complex, unfolding narrative in which children's and teachers' stories are intermingled with subject matter and situated within a nested set of narrative contexts" (Huber & Clandinin, 2005, p. 319). However, Penny had no way to



know the narrative contexts the children lived out, except in the intermittent experiences she had when she was called in. Although she was in this classroom numerous times over the 2 years in which the research occurred, there were gaps shaped by long periods of time between. Relationship building was done in fits and starts, and each day felt like the first day to both Penny and the students. From these fits and starts and intermingled stories, I pulled threads of experience, as Penny told them in our conversations, because of the way each thread shaped the curriculum-making moment with the potential for shaping Penny's identity making.

By weaving together fragments of stories that emerged across transcripts and field notes, I created a series of interwoven word images. These images, based on conversations between December 2010 and July 2012, were found in Penny's interpretations of the ways she thought others saw her. In the following poem, Penny's voice interweaves with the voices of students, other teachers, and an educational assistant who surround the curriculum-making moment. To contextualize this and make it clear for the reader, Penny's voice is represented on the right side of the page, while the voices of the imagined others are on the left. There is voice in this composing of the word images, residing in my interpretation based on the field texts. The process I used to create the following set of images imitates the composing of found poetry developed by Dillard (1995), Richardson (2002), Butler-Kisber (2010), Huber (2005), and Clandinin et al., (2006). These authors "find" words and phrases from interviews and transcripts, field notes, and

field texts that participants have shared in telling. Researchers then shape them into new interpretive texts they call “found poetry” (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 84) or “word images” (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 114). In the following interpretive texts, I have pulled forward images of those around Penny who shaped her identity making in the previous curriculum-making moment.

**Word images.**

Penny the substitute teacher . . .

*I want to teach from my philosophy.*

*But that’s the whole thing about subbing.*

*It’s not you.*

*I go against what I think.*

*I’m not the kind of teacher I want to be right now.*

Other teachers . . .

Sitting at the lunch table

Talking about another substitute teacher who eats in her car a lot—

“She just doesn’t like making all that effort in the staff room every day.

She had no control of the class.”

We request her services

Penny . . .

*But that’s the whole thing about subbing.*

*It’s not you.*

*You are an island as a substitute teacher.*

*No one is looking out for you.*

*I could take myself off the sub list and I would just  
be gone.*

Educational assistant . . .

The substitute teacher is fair and kind

She has such a sweet demeanor

I saw her crying in the stairwell

Penny . . .

*subbing is forcing me to be not who I want  
to be.*

Tyler, a student . . .

She is too lenient

She is kind of funny and tells jokes

I want to have friends, and my friends like it when I am loud and energetic

Penny . . .

*that is not who I am,*

Justine, a student . . .

Remedial math—I don't want to be here—I don't want to do it.

Whose instructions do we follow?

It's my classroom

So many constraints

It's not you.

Penny . . .

*that is not who I am,*

Cody, a student . . .

I asked her to put the music on during gym time.

key ring just sitting on her stuff

The sound system key.

Someone took it

I sure don't like being treated like a criminal.

playing a little lottery here.

gambling because we know we could get a lot worse.

Penny . . .

*It makes me sad to think about who I have become as a  
substitute.*

*I don't even listen to kids anymore.*

*You never know what your day is going to be like.*

*it is the first day every day*

(Interim research text based on field notes, 2013)

In the given word images, multiple plotlines weave into Penny's experience of curriculum making and identity making at school—plotlines of belonging or not belonging to community as Penny lived between and among relationships with other teachers in various schools. She felt criticism of her beginning practice and at the same time recognized that they needed her.

The word image of the educational assistant carries a storyline of seeing Penny struggling, while at the same time resonating with the helplessness of the situation. Both substitute teachers and educational assistants live closely with children yet experience silence when others do not attend to their voices in schools.

Tyler, Justine, and Cody carried multiple plotlines that wove and collided with Penny's story to live by. Making friends with humour as part of that process and feeling less than in math were student plotlines that bumped with Penny's stories. Based on the word images, I wondered if the children's plotlines that bumped with Penny's story to live by pushed her into a plotline of policing rather than negotiating relationship. Trust became a significant theme for Penny in moments of relational curriculum making with students. Penny negotiated a situation where her willingness to trust students was broken, and as a result she doubted her own trustworthiness. This is also evident in how the students felt about her when the key went missing. When Penny reported the stolen key to the principal, she was afraid she would be seen as non-competent and was surprised when she was called to teach the same class the next day.

Within Penny's own story to live by, diverse storylines collided, creating complexities she had to make sense of. An example of bumping storylines was the collision between a spirit of adventure and a feeling of isolation. The spirit of adventure was ever present as she travelled into a new classroom of children each day. The challenge of negotiating surprises thrilled her. At the same time, when

she experienced tension in curriculum-making moments, she did not have a community of experienced teachers to help her make sense of it. Isolation and longing for connection to a school's professional community were simultaneous storylines.

One way for Penny to make sense of these colliding storylines was to create an overarching storyline in which she was living an experience in ways that were "not her." She felt she was telling someone else's story. She had an imagined storyline of who she wanted to be as a professional; however, she was not able to sustain that story because of particular curriculum-making moments with students that interrupted continuity.

#### **Unpacking intersections.**

The word images exemplify the complexity of the many lives that meet in a classroom. Turning back to the morning that Austin came into the classroom swearing, I paused in the intersection of storylines.

The children and others negotiated curriculum making as conflicting plotlines intersected. Although Cody, Justine, Tyler, the other teachers, and the educational assistant were not in the room when the particular moment occurred, they shaped Penny's and Austin's experiences.

In previous literature, marginalization, commodification, and meaninglessness have been common ways to describe the experiences of substitute teachers.

Penny felt she worked from the margins as a substitute teacher. The dominant story of substitute teacher as a marginal member of an education community (Abdal-Haqq, 1997; Duggleby & Badali, 2007; Shilling, 1991) influenced the way she negotiated curriculum-making moments with children in classrooms. When Cody's sense of pushing the boundaries and gambling with how much he could get away with met Penny's storyline of trust, the dominant school story of a milieu of locked doors was perpetuated when she left her key to the sound system out in the open and it went missing after class. Perhaps Penny was less patient with Austin that morning because of the numerous experiences like those with Cody and the missing key. These experiences where she negotiated as a rule's enforcer from the margins depleted her physical and emotional energy. Justine, living a plotline of not wanting to be at school because of her experiences with math and the many constraints of an institution, shaped Penny's and Austin's experiences. Penny wanted school to be a positive and creative place for children where they made a difference in each other's lives, and this was not how Justine or Austin experienced school. Penny was also positioned on the margins with other full-time contract teachers who lived a plotline of community at the staffroom lunch table. Another substitute teacher, who isolated herself by eating in her car, shaped, in part, what it means to be a substitute teacher. These intersections influenced Penny's moment with Austin that morning, and marginalization was significant in shaping each meeting.

Research literature also stories substitute teachers as a commodity to be managed (Baldwin, 1934; Duggleby & Badali, 2007; Perkins, 1966) rather than as “real” teachers (Lunay, 2006, p. 171; Young et al., 2012, p. 112). Other teachers as experts used the services of Penny as a lesser commodity, while Penny wanted to live the storyline of a valued professional involved relationally over time. Cody saw teachers as good commodities and lesser commodities. He saw a teacher that he valued as the luck of the draw, rather than as someone he co-composed a relationship with. He gambled with what luck sent his way, rather than working to build relationship. Because of experiences with Cody, Penny did not trust herself or have the energy to meet Austin with her natural inclination to co-compose relationship. Administrators who spent time showing Penny the physical classroom space, helping her log on to the attendance program on the computer, finding the lesson plan, dealing with students who were disrespectful to her, and other managerial situations all contributed to the moment of curriculum making explored in this chapter.

Maxine Greene (1995) helped me shift into a new way of seeing a beginning teacher. Seeing big, according to Greene, allows us to see Penny’s experience from her point of view in the midst of both her personal and practical life, rather than as a commodity that an institution managed:

To see things or people small, one chooses to see from a detached point of view, to watch behaviors from the perspective of a system, to be concerned with trends and tendencies rather than the intentionality and



concreteness of everyday life. To see things or people big, one must resist viewing other human beings as mere objects or chess pieces and view them in their integrity and particularity instead. One must see from the point of view of the participant in the midst of what is happening. (p. 10)

When Penny was heard by her mother in a conversation between them as teachers, they talked about intersections of curriculum making with children. Through these conversations, she was more able to make the situation meaningful for herself. As she made sense of an experience in educative ways, she broadened her story to live by to include more than one single story.

Although Penny clung to yearnings of settling into a life of marriage and a household of children whose holidays would be similar to hers, these lifestyle goals were not enough to sustain her as a substitute teacher. Her single story of making a difference in children's lives as a teacher in a permanent contract held her. It was her single story to live by, which both interrupted her identity making and sustained it.

*That knowing that I have a gift with children  
helping raise kids actually*

*It's not a knowledge that is surface but rather a deep part of who I am.*

(Research conversation, 2011)

When Penny's story of who she was as a teacher did not fit with the students' preceding classroom situation, continuity was interrupted for all of them as they negotiated moment by moment. One way to interpret the immediate

environment of tension was for Penny to say that it was not her choice to react the way she did. She interpreted her response to be contextually set. This single story of success was shaped by experiences both professionally and personally, in-school and out-of-school places.

### **What do we do now that we have heard her stories?**

Substitute teachers fulfill a central role in maintaining the continuity of Kindergarten to Grade 12 education (Duggleby & Badali, 2007). There are many reasons substitute teachers are called in: teaching classes while the regular classroom teachers are in professional development; while they are collaborating and team teaching; or while they are on educational leaves, personal leaves, or fulfilling responsibilities with teachers' federations and organizations.

Increasingly, regular classroom teachers need another teacher to step into their classroom while they are away. Illness is another reason for teachers to call on substitute teachers. A report funded by the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation (Martin, Dolmage, & Sharpe, 2012) reports a decline in teacher wellness as the following findings iterate:

Teachers' levels of work-related commitment, engagement, and satisfaction are continually being eroded by formidable workloads that involve average workweeks that exceed 50 hours, increasingly complex and expanding responsibilities, exposure to a considerable array of negative work-related stressors, and the toll that work-related stress has on their personal lives and their physical and mental health. The sobering

truth is that our findings are entirely consistent with other large-scale investigations of the work life and health of teachers in other Canadian provinces and international jurisdictions. (p. 28)

In light of these realities, Martin, Dolmage, and Sharpe (2012) are not surprised by attrition rates among teachers and the concern regarding recruitment. They argue that the “demands and expectations that are placed upon teachers need to be modified and/or reduced, and that substantial improvements must be made to the supports and resources that are offered to teachers” (p. 28). With teachers facing pressure that affects their well-being, substitute teachers are needed even more yet with the milieu as it is, their work is increasingly challenging as well. Sustaining teachers includes an examination of the resources and supports provided for substitute teachers. Sustaining the well-being of teacher identity at the beginning of a career includes attention to beginning teachers who are employed as substitute teachers.

## Chapter Seven: Teacher Knowledge at the Beginning of a Career

### Intellectual Work on the Professional Knowledge Landscape

“I’m good at starting again. I can be a chameleon; I can get along with anybody.” (Anna, December 20, 2010)

#### Abstract

In this chapter, I focus on how the experience of intellectual work was part of sustaining a beginning teacher on the professional knowledge landscape<sup>11</sup> at the beginning of her career. Anna, the beginning teacher in this inquiry, shared stories of experience in which she made many starts. Even though she understood herself to be good at starting new things and she trusted her abilities to form healthy relationships, her first teaching contract challenged her to make sense of many new situations. A theme in her stories was that life on the professional knowledge landscape was about making sense of situations that did not fit with the continuity of her familial narrative. Her new life in the classroom began with giving a body to the story of who she already was in her personal life. This act of integrating what she knew in her personal life into her new professional life is embodied knowledge. The phrase embodied knowledge suggests a way of understanding that resides in a whole person. It is living a story with a body, mind, and spirit. Embodied knowledge is “personal practical knowledge”

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<sup>11</sup> The professional-knowledge landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) is a storied landscape used to understand teacher knowledge as relational, intellectual, and moral. It consists of in-classroom places where personal knowledge *of* teachers is used in their practice and out-of-classroom places where knowledge *for* teachers is mandated by policy makers and others.

(Connelly and Clandinin, 1988) which is a “moral, affective, and aesthetic way to know what comes from a person’s past, present, and future experiences” (p. 59).

Anna’s process of making sense and adapting to new environments in teaching included embodied knowledge and was intellectual work. Intellectual work was an examination of her personal stories and her children’s stories, the milieu and the demands imposed on them in the classroom. Through this rigorous reflective practice she was doing the intellectual work of teaching. She was being a teacher in the midst of thinking, and using multiple stories from her past and future to frame her present thinking.

An introductory conceptualization of intellectual work can be defined as an embodied knowledge that is cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and physical. As a narrative term, intellectual work is the act of creating a narrative with one’s life. Intellectual work is situated in a plotline of a person’s past, present, and future. Intellectual work occurs particularly when a person makes sense of how particular situations might fit into a person’s existing plotline of their lives. Stories within the plotline are models for future stories within a life narrative, and intellectual work includes thinking with these stories. For Anna, making sense of a situation from the midst of a personal plotline involved an interaction between her own stories to live by and those around her.

**Adapting in diverse situations: Living *as* a teacher.**

Anna spoke of herself as a chameleon. It was a story she told of herself as a child who moved between her grandparents’ homestead, which she called

home, to new places each autumn because of her father's work. She learned to adapt and adjust according to whatever came her way. She knew herself to be someone who could shift and change.

When she told stories of herself as a teacher, she continued to imagine herself shifting within that story. Change was part of what made the profession exciting for her as she adapted to and negotiated surprises along the way. Shifting who she was in each unique relationship with the children in her classroom and the many situations in school were opportunities for her to assert her abilities to make sense of uncertainty. Although she questioned herself in each situation, she acted *as* a teacher. Indeed, in the first 2 years of her teaching career, she spoke of herself *as* a teacher, not as someone who was *becoming* a teacher. Teaching was not a linear process of becoming in which she acquired skills until she reached a certain point of arrival. For Anna, teaching was an interwoven part of her identity long before she accepted her first teaching contract.

Her identity both on and off the professional knowledge landscape was firmly founded on stories of herself as one who was independent and able to find her way out of difficult situations in life, using her knowledge. She was a knowledgeable person with a wealth of life experiences to draw from. Part of this knowledge was her ability to change within relationships with the people and places around her. She trusted this knowledge, based on many experiences of transitioning with her family. She also trusted her knowledge of who she was and what it meant to be a teacher. This knowledge, which included her sense of

herself as a chameleon, helped her make sense of each new situation at the beginning of her career as a teacher.

**Anna in relation to the dominant story of beginning teachers.**

Beginning teachers' experiences have been storied as a struggle for survival on the professional induction landscape (Anhorn, 2008b; Hellsten, Prytula, & Ebanks, 2009; Huberman, 1989). In these accounts of survival, teachers are referred to as beginners—not fully knowledgeable or fully equipped. Their experiences are seen as problems to be fixed rather than situations to make sense of. It is assumed they will become or construct a fixed role of teacher through processes of induction and mentoring. However, this is not how Anna told her story. Rather, she told stories of being engaged in decision making and reflection to make sense of diverse experiences in school. Who she was with her family and in other personal experiences outside school shaped the decisions she made in her classroom. This knowledge from which she made decisions was embodied and lived into her experiences with children in schools. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) call this knowledge shaped through life experience personal practical knowledge.<sup>12</sup> For Anna, personal practical knowledge was shaped by her experiences prior to her life in school and in her current teaching practices, which were carried forward into future decisions and actions. Rather than a

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<sup>12</sup> Personal practical knowledge is a term used to describe teachers as knowledgeable people. Personal practical knowledge is that body of convictions, that have come from experience (intimate, social, and traditional) and that are expressed in a person's practices (Clandinin, 1985). This knowledge is shaped by both personal experiences that happen outside school and professional experiences that happen in school places. It is "imbued with all the experiences that make up a person's being. Its meaning is derived from, and understood in terms of a person's experiential history, both professional and personal" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 7).

wonder about the struggle for survival or induction process, this research puzzle emerged as an inquiry into how Anna, a teacher at the beginning of her career, made sense of diverse situations and how this sense making shifted her practice in curriculum making<sup>13</sup> with children and their families.

Specifically, I inquired into the ways Anna's personal practical knowledge collided with the grand narratives of school, with the narratives of others, and with her narratives of self. Stories from Anna's personal world of embodied knowledge are explored alongside stories of interactions in her classroom in order to understand how intellectual work shaped her shifting and changing identity as a teacher.

### **Intellectual work as a teacher.**

The term *intellectual*, particularly in the academy, carries a mythos that suggests a rational rather than an emotional engagement—a term that suggests an ability to think logically and insinuates serious study and thought. Intellect is interpreted as something that happens cognitively and separately from the rest of the person's experiences. In his work to describe the structure of the intellect, Guilford (1956) described psychological functions and cognition factors such as spatial perception, general reasoning, convergent and divergent thinking, object naming, abstraction naming, symbol manipulation, numerical facility, word fluency, and memory factors to be some of the factors. This interpretation of

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<sup>13</sup>Curriculum making is viewed as “an account of children's and teachers' lives together in schools and classrooms . . . [in which] the teacher is seen as an integral part of the curricular process . . . [where] teacher, learner, subject matter and milieu are in dynamic interaction” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 392).



intellect has continued into the present as Grossman (2000) explains, “the human intellect has an almost irresistible urge to categorize and simplify” (p. 1). For the purposes of this research, these conceptualizations of intellectual work, psychological functions, and cognition factors to categorize are not sufficient to reclaim the term as part of experiential living.

I articulate a narrative conceptualization of *intellectual work* to be a term that shows teacher knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) to be an embodied narrative that has grown from life experience. Intellectual work—thinking with stories from her experience—was evident in the decisions Anna made in moments of tension. Intellectual work in her professional life was about making sense of a situation from the midst of a personal plotline. Making sense from the midst of a personal plotline is a form of tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1962). This unspoken knowledge is a touchstone that shapes identity for a teacher.

Nieto (2003, 2006) supports the claim for intellectual work as a theme in sustaining teachers in their work. She refers to an inquiry group of teachers doing intellectual work by engaging with trusted colleagues “in adult conversations about unasked questions” (Nieto, 2003, p. 393). Participation in an inquiry group was a way teachers engaged in intellectual work as they wrestled with tensions on their professional knowledge landscapes and constantly updated their personal practical knowledge through making sense of those tensions with people they trusted. With people they trusted, they shared stories where they felt vulnerable. As they thought with their own personal stories, their colleagues were also

furthering understanding through their stories of experience. In this intellectual work where teachers share together they are thinking with each other's stories. Their individual teacher knowledge was nested (Murphy, 2004) in the teacher knowledge of the group of teachers. The relationships within a group are mediated by the shifts that teachers make when situated within nested teacher knowledge. I wondered about how Anna looked for ways to situate her personal practical knowledge within nests of teacher knowledge and how her nested familial knowledge went with her into conversations with colleagues. I wondered about ways teacher educators and others on the professional knowledge landscape facilitated nested knowledge with teachers at the beginning of their careers.

#### **The process of exploring Anna's intellectual work.**

Working with Anna as a research participant, we defined the purposes of the research and had weekly conversations together outside school that shaped the inquiry. These conversations generated field texts including transcripts of the research conversations, field notes, portfolio excerpts, oral histories, stories of Anna's education as a child in elementary schools, stories of her teaching, family stories, photographs, personal artifacts, and collage. After collecting field texts, I began to analyze the data using the three-dimensional inquiry space, which consists of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Simultaneously, I began writing interim research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), two of which are used in this chapter. The interim research texts were based on the field texts and were created to bring forth threads or rhythms that

recurred in the research over time and supported the subsequent writing of final research texts.

### **Situating Anna's teacher knowledge.**

Anna was a young teacher in a classroom of Grade 4 students. She was committed to inquiry learning and processes of questioning. She encouraged her students to be curious and open to possibilities. She thought intentionally about each of her students and paid attention to their lives in relationship with each other in their classroom community. Over 2 years, she grew from understanding curriculum as being a legal document from which she implemented the mandated outcomes and indicators set out by the Ministry of Education to practicing curriculum as course of life (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992), which is about individuals cocomposing multiple identities in the midst of community.

Anna composed her identity, her story to live by,<sup>14</sup> in relation to what was happening around her in the classroom, and at the same time her life in school remained connected to experiences in her personal life. Her experiences in her classroom, in relation to who she was outside school, were part of her whole life story. The narrative she composed was an embodied knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) that helped her make sense of new situations.

### **Embodied knowledge in a moment of curriculum making.**

The first interim text is a glimpse into Anna's embodied knowledge that she brought to teaching from her life outside school. Experiences in her family

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<sup>14</sup> A "story to live by" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4) is acknowledged as a narrative concept for identity.

and experiences she had growing up shaped this embodied knowledge. The second account is of a curriculum-making moment that Anna experienced with children in her classroom. In this account, we see the intellectual work she engaged in as she tried to make sense of a particular tension-filled situation. Further, in this article I hold the second account alongside the first to understand how her embodied knowledge shaped her decisions within a curriculum-making moment in her classroom.

*Anna's embodied knowledge: Narrative beginnings.*

Based on her stories, the first interim text that follows narrates personal threads of experience in Anna's life. This interim text, based on a narrative of experience, is part of the web of stories she brought with her into her first teaching position. The following account was composed from research conversations over 2 years. Based on an understanding of Murphy's (2004) work with fictionalized text, I wrote the following narrative sketch in order to represent who Anna was within a continuous plotline that could be visible to the reader. The following sketch is based on the amalgamation of stories she told. She did not tell these stories in the sequence that I have put together here; rather, I took up her voice after reading through transcripts and field notes from research conversations and wrote them as one story. After I had finished the sketch, I shared it with her to be certain I was representing her in relationally ethical ways. The *I* in the following paragraphs refers to Anna.

I left the house many winter mornings wearing the mukluks that my grandmother made for me. The intricate embroidery and brightly coloured beadwork stepped proudly on my feet through white snow on my way to school. When I could see the cement steps of the high school, I took off the mukluks and hid them in my backpack. School was not a place to claim my Métis heritage.

In summer the pine trees called me home. Poplar trees lined the summer road, and creaking floorboards in the farmhouse held my grandfather's memory. It was the place where grandma used to encourage us to get dirty. She encouraged us to explore and play outside. She talked with us while she tanned hides. Sometimes in the evenings, we played bingo at the hall. I remember sitting between the aunties and hearing their conversations as they talked and listened for the winning numbers. I learned to count as I stacked and lined up the bingo chips beside them. Summer at Ash Creek with my grandma and cousins was the place where I first learned what it meant to belong.

Simultaneously and over time, another story pulled against my story of belonging. Every autumn my family moved from one urban place to the next for my father's employment. I made new friends in each different school, even though I always felt different from the group—being the new person in the classroom with each move. Making my life in each new city was fraught with hard stories.

The statistics about First Nations young women were my life. Nightmares itch my memory and animate my bones. My fair skin masked a thousand lifetimes of stories—stories of colonization—stories in which First Nations and Métis peoples faced discrimination in Canadian society. I walked hand in hand with racism as memories of emotional and physical violence left biting wounds that still crawl cold into my sleep and shape how I make my life. At the same time, a fierce pride for my Métis heritage was growing inside me. I think about my grandfather and the way people respected him in the community. People held him in high regard because of his integrity. Because of him and my family at Ash Creek, I wanted to belong as much as I wanted to be different from mainstream white society. I lived between stories of myself. I do not come to teaching from a sheltered life. (Interim text from research conversations, December 2010–2011)

Anna came to teaching with a narrative that included the given stories. These stories were crucial to the shaping of Anna's story to live by over time. They were stories that she carried into her teaching.

As she entered the world of school as a new teacher, she began to see another story of herself on the edges of what she knew. While her story of attending to children remained central, on the periphery she felt overwhelmed by the technical aspects of teaching in an institution that included standardized achievement tests, preparing several plans for adaptation of a class, and

implementation of mandated outcomes. While her commitment to making space for diversity and different world views in her classroom remained at the forefront, she felt tension in negotiating life in the classroom. Even though she spoke of herself as a teacher, she asked herself who she would be in this new story. These questions helped her find meaning in the midst of tension-filled experiences. This quest to make meaning in relation to her embodied knowledge and experience was intellectual work.

**Narrative inquiry conceptualizations of intellectual work in the field of education.**

Narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) has a rich tradition of conceptualizing the knowledge of teachers, as it is understood through experience (Dewey, 1938). Although Anna learned from observing colleagues informally and participated in ongoing mandated professional development, her embodied knowledge from experiences before accepting her first contract also shaped the curriculum-making moments with children in her classroom. Connelly, Clandinin, and He (1997) wrote about teacher knowledge research, recognizing that what teachers know is expressed in their teaching. Teacher knowledge was evident in how Anna lived in her classroom. What she learned with her grandmother and aunts was expressed in the ways she planned for her students. It was expressed in how she approached textbooks. In addition, it was expressed in ways she lived relationally with those around her. In the same way, Morris (2001) spoke of thinking *with* stories as a way of putting reason and emotion into

experience—so too did Anna think with her experiences. Morris said, “Thinking with stories is a process in which we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative as take the radical step back, almost a return to childhood experience of allowing narrative to work on us” (p. 55). Anna thought with stories and allowed them to work in her moments of curriculum making in her classroom.

**A moment of curriculum making.**

The subject matter of math in her classroom was a place where Anna reflected on what she was doing in her classroom and how that related to her own experience as a whole. Personal practical knowledge came from her own story of learning to count. As a child, she learned to count with bingo chips in the midst of community. This experience happened in her hands and beside people who used the chips for a purpose. In her classroom, she encouraged students to talk about math in their own lives. For her, the textbook was not close enough to experience outside the classroom. I created the following account from conversations with Anna over 2 years. They are her words, in her voice; the researcher’s voice is not included.

If the lesson in the textbook is not related to their lives, I skip over it.

Using symbols to think about math is such a foreign, foreign, foreign idea, especially to our Aboriginal students. There is not any connection to their own experience when they read the textbook. For me, I relate everything to money. Every single thing to money. And that is how I engage some of my learners in my class. I grew up playing bingo. I don’t know if



that's why I relate everything to money. But I see things mostly in 25-cent coins. And as soon as I say, "think about a quarter," they get it. The day I took the numbers away in math—that worked. They freaked out a little bit at first, but it worked. It's hard to teach kids that these numbers just represent something in life. But without those symbols, math is nothing. I posed different questions like, "How many people fit in a car? Your car. If you don't have a car, how many people would fit in a bus?" But they couldn't use any math symbols. They had to represent what they were thinking in another way. I don't really understand math, unless it relates to my life.

The teacher across the hall though, she sticks to the textbook. She was saying she is halfway through the outcomes in the curriculum document. So that makes me question what I am doing. I am not anywhere close to halfway through the outcomes. And there is one parent in my classroom who is very aware of where we are at in the textbook. She wants her child to have math homework every night.

Another thing that I am thinking about is how I get kids to talk about math in their lives, and I am thinking about how I arrange their desks so they can talk together. I read that if you are a new teacher freaking out about setting up a classroom, start both September and January with students seated in rows. So I did. Everyone facing me, the teacher—the keeper of all. But last year I had them sitting in groups, and I

had teachers come in and tell me, “Oh no, you don’t want to do this, you’ll go crazy!” Already I didn’t feel good being the only beige<sup>15</sup> person in school. (Interim text based on research conversations, December 2010–January 2011)

When Anna thought about fitting in, she equated fitting in with doing the same things other teachers around her were doing. She tried seating her children in rows, but found that pods suited their methods of curriculum making in ways that were more beneficial. There was tension for Anna in this because she wanted to fit in with her colleagues, and in her understanding of how to do that, being the same—seating her students in rows—was part of fitting in. She continued to explain how she wanted to belong in the following account.

I was struggling to fit in. So I thought, “OK, I’ll start with rows so that I fit in.” And I did it again this year because my colleague across the hall keeps her kids in rows all year. But OK, this year, they came back in January and they were perfect. Little angels. Something in the water, I don’t know. So this time based on criteria, they chose their pod of five. The learning this week is phenomenal. They are helping each other, helping each other with their math, and they keep asking, “Can I work with so and so?” And I am like “People, you are beside each other, that is the idea!” And when some of them complain, I say, “Get over yourself.

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<sup>15</sup> Beige is Anna’s way of referring to the story of colonialism and stories of not belonging. With the recognition of skin color she is also referring to the story of racism.

You gotta work through it. You are human beings.” (Interim text based on research conversations, December 2010–January 2011)

Anna attended to children and their relationships between each other. She attended to their diverse stories to live by and made space for each of them to live from these stories. She was aware of her colleagues and the practices around her, but ultimately, if those practices did not fit her and her children she was not afraid to try other things. This stepping out took courage, because it mattered to her that she fit with other teachers. She understood belonging as a teacher to include having the same practices as the other teachers in the school. She thought she needed to do the same thing in her classroom that the teacher across the hall was doing in order to fit in. In these moments of tension, she worked intellectually to make sense of the situation.

### **Creating connective threads.**

In the following section, I lay the two interim texts alongside each other to understand how Anna used embodied knowledge to make sense of the tensions she was experiencing in a classroom curriculum-making moment. Her embodied knowledge helped her create connections between what she knew and what was challenging for her. I explored her intellectual work, making sense with embodied knowledge, narratively, through Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) conceptualization of a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. Within the framework of this metaphorical three-dimensional space, I moved “inward and outward, forward and back” (p. 50) to explore Anna’s experience. The personal

and social dimensions of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space shaped an understanding about questions of her inward experience and “internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions [and outward] toward the existential conditions, that is, the environment” (p. 50). Temporality, another dimension, opens a space to explore backward and forward from the moments in the interim research texts as I attend to past, present, and future. Place, the final dimension, “attends to the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes” (p. 51). Anna’s embodied knowledge came out of experiences in attention to all of these dimensions.

Using Clandinin and Connelly’s narrative inquiry space as a framework, I return to the moment of curriculum making in Anna’s classroom. I explore continuities and discontinuities that she experienced. Stories of sustaining and interrupting what she knew shaped tensions, helped her make decisions, and raised questions between the different personal and professional landscapes that she travelled between.

***Creating connective threads: Articulating tensions.***

Articulating the tension was an important part of meaning making for Anna. Tension was a connective thread between colliding stories. “Tension is a central component in understanding the experience” (Clandinin et al., 2009, p. 88) because of the way it interrupts a story to live by. Stories of textbook assignments and covering mandated outcomes bumped with stories from her grandmother and

the way she learned to count in the bingo hall alongside her aunts. Articulating this as a tension was a first step in making sense of a situation.

In Anna's embodied knowledge, life in learning spaces was experienced in relationship with other people and the places she was in. The memory of herself with her grandma, who encouraged her to get dirty and explore the outdoors in playful ways, shaped who she was as a teacher. Because of that embodied knowledge, she encouraged her students to work through the messiness of creating and sustaining small groups, even when other teachers told her to seat her students in rows. For Anna, mess was part of learning. The experienced teacher across the hall created an interruption for her, which caused her to ask questions about her practice. Tension because of interrupted continuity in her embodied knowledge led to questions. The process of questioning was part of her process of telling and retelling. Things needed to make sense for Anna, and narrative coherence was a process of making a life that hung together. Carr (1986) described narrative coherence in part as "telling and retelling, to ourselves and to others, the story of what we are about and what we are" (p. 97). According to Carr, we tell a story of who we are. When that story of who we are is interrupted, we experience tension. Carr continued by writing,

Our lives admit of sometimes more, sometimes less coherence; they hang together reasonably well, but they occasionally tend to fall apart.

Coherence seems to be a need imposed on us whether we seek it or not.

Things need to make sense. We feel the lack of sense when it goes

missing. The unity of self, not as an underlying identity but as a life that hangs together, is not a pre-given condition but an achievement. Some of us succeed, it seems. Better than others. None of us succeeds totally. We keep at it. What we are doing is telling and retelling, to ourselves and to others, the story of what we are about and what we are. (Carr, 1986, p. 97)

It was particularly when she bumped against stories of others and stories of school that Anna worked to make sense of a situation. Understanding began with asking questions. Her ability to step back, identify, and articulate the tension from which decisions and questions emerged was intellectual work in the service of finding meaning between diverse worlds and accompanying stories to live by. Asking questions from the midst of tension was part of negotiating a path toward choices and decisions. Anna's intellect was engaged fully in situations of tension as she negotiated a shifting story to live by. Shifting stories required choices and decisions along the way. It was at these points of interrupted narrative that her intellect engaged to make sense and problem solve a way forward. Tensions could open starting points for the process of decision making.

***Creating connective threads: Making decisions.***

Decisions along the way were connective threads between Anna's embodied knowledge and new situations in her classroom. The narrative beginnings and embodied knowledge that came with her to teaching shaped decisions in her classroom. She spoke of herself as a teacher, not as becoming a

teacher. Decision making was located in Anna's identity *as* a teacher and not in *becoming* a teacher. For Anna, her stories to live by were that of teacher, while necessarily incomplete (Miller, 1998), and therefore as a person unfolding as a teacher. Her experiences of decision making in relation to this unfolding identity as a teacher were a thread in the field texts, drawing my attention to her living and the tensions that were necessarily part of this living.

Anna experienced tension as she worked intellectually to plan and respond to her students' needs. As she reflected on how she would have her students seated for math, she went to her embodied knowledge of subject matter and of being in relationship. She remembered sitting between her aunts, stacking chips and learning to count. She remembers the feeling of belonging that came with the conversations surrounding the chips. Alongside the embodied story of belonging was also the story of living many different lives where she could not find belonging, as she remembered taking off her mukluks a block away from her high school and hiding them in her backpack.

***Creating connective threads: Asking questions between knowledge communities.***

With embodied knowledge surrounding moments of curriculum making, Anna negotiated complex decision making. In each unique situation, decisions called for deliberate questioning and reflection as she made sense of the situations. She asked questions such as:

Had she made the right decision in the moment? Was there adequate evidence to support the direction of her decision? Did her decisions fit with who she was and what she was about? What happened and why did this work? How will I change it next time? (Research conversations January 2010–June 2012)

The questions she asked depended on how she perceived the situation as a whole, and the complexity of each experience was never entirely visible to her, yet the given questions were present in many diverse curriculum-making moments.

Decisions and thoughtful reflection in diverse situations shaped who she was as a teacher. Who she was as a teacher also shaped the decisions she made. The girl who took off her mukluks a block away from the school was the same teacher who wanted to belong with her colleagues in her school as a beginning teacher and the same person who wanted her students to open spaces of belonging for each other. She knew that the seating arrangements she made influenced how students would learn together and create community together. The decisions she made were not neutral.

Anna's strong sense of belonging, which she learned from her personal experiences as a child spending summers at Ash Creek, carried into her life as a teacher in a new community. It was a narrative thread that continued over time in her story to live by. Because she wanted to fit into a particular school that held particular norms and to be like the teachers around her, she decided to seat her



students in rows. She wanted to belong to the community of teachers in her school.

One of her childhood stories to live by was about adapting. She knew how to find common ground in new relationships between herself and other people as she began each fall in a different school. At the same time, one of her familial stories was about feeling othered because of her Métis heritage. Through our many research conversations, the issue of race lay under everything Anna talked about. The colour of her skin and the stories she carried with her from her past shaped her experiences. In the same way that as a high school student she took her mukluks off before she got to school, by arranging the desks in her classroom, she was making a choice based on wanting to fit into the community of teachers around her and making choices for what she understood to be good for her children's learning. However, being "beige" could neither be taken off nor rearranged. Being the only "beige" person in her school meant that she was faced with differences of race. She worked within her personal practical knowledge to find a way to reconcile her own concepts of race in her school, which was predominantly a non-beige environment. Her efforts at reconciling her knowledge about being "beige" within a non-beige environment caused another thread in her web (Murphy, 2004) to vibrate.

In making her decisions, Anna relied on theories and practices she had observed and heard informally from her colleagues. She articulated situations of uncertainty to other teachers that helped her generate possible explanations. From

interaction with other teachers, reading professional resources, and reflecting on her embodied knowledge, she synthesized a plan and made sense of the tension from what she knew.

Her intellectual work was situated in the context of her personal and practical embodied knowledge—informed by the context of the teachers around her and the community of students she taught. Conversations with her peers through informal talk and casual observation shaped how she thought about choices in her classroom. Craig's (1995) conceptualization of knowledge communities informs my understanding of how Anna constructed and re-constructed personal practical knowledge. Knowledge communities use the teaching experience as “the text of the inquiry” (p. 157). Through discussions about teaching experience, beginning teachers story and re-story their experiences in relations to others around them.

Furthering this idea of knowledge communities, it is also evident that Anna would have knowledge communities outside school where she told stories of tension-filled curriculum-making moments. These knowledge communities outside school contribute to understanding Anna, a beginning teacher, as whole. For Anna, being a teacher was not a story to live by that she took up only at school. Rather, being a teacher was Anna's story to live by in all places. Part of her decision making included embodied knowledge that came from experience with people outside school. Her grandmother and aunties continued to be part of a nested knowledge community that shaped her intellectual work in the

classroom. Although she questioned her practices, eventually Anna considered the personal within personal practical knowledge equally. She decided to make choices for her students' learning based on her own personal and practical experiences of what her students needed. She decided that what was considered best practice for others was not best for her and her students.

To support the perspective that intellectual work is composed in relation to and with other people, I refer to Craig's (2007) approach to teachers' narratives of experience, which she called story constellations. She suggested, "Stories told and re-told begin with individuals and groups of individuals are shaped in and by teachers as they navigate their professional knowledge landscapes" (p. 176). She built on the idea that many shifting narratives, each with many individual plotlines and meanings, moralities, and mores come to a group for discussion and analysis. Anna was clearly part of a knowledge community in her school where she looked to align herself with colleagues. When her stories of how to learn math collided with the teacher across the hall, she questioned herself, but after reflection chose what she felt was best for her students. In this choice, she was clearly one of the individuals in the midst of a story constellation. Anna asked many questions between her personal knowledge communities and her professional knowledge communities. By attending to and valuing a beginning teacher's knowledge communities outside school, connecting threads may offer strength in sustaining her.

### **Situating intellectual work in the field of education.**

Previous social science research literature has explained teachers as intellectuals in a variety of ways. Biesta (2007), Robinson (2012), and others (Van den Bossche, Gijsselaers, Segers, & Kirschner, 2006) view the intellectual work of a teacher as being an agent in and for student learning. Anna, too, was an agent in her students' learning. For Anna this sense of agency was rooted in stories of relationship. She embodied a sense of agency because of the way teachers in her own life had inspired her. Teachers such as her family became part of her plotline. Floden and Clark (1988), Munthe (2001), and Helsing (2007) believe agency is constructed rather than applied, especially in the uncertainty of the activity of teaching. However, while they say knowledge is constructed rather than applied, it is still assumed there is a particular knowledge that needs to be constructed.

Within the field of education, the intellectual work of teachers has also been explored extensively through various forms of narrative research. Nieto (2003), Elbaz (1981), Hollingsworth (1994), Lyons (1990), and Paley (1999) explored teacher conversations, creativity, practical knowledge, subject-specific knowledge, dilemmas of knowing, and case studies of teacher experience. Their research shaped how I understood Anna's new experiences. Anna came to teaching with knowledge of herself as teacher. This concept was embodied and learned through experience.

***Teacher knowledge is embodied.***

There is a growing shift away from providing knowledge for teachers toward considering teachers as knowledgeable people and examining ways that their individual knowledge influences the learning experiences in their classrooms. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) differentiate between knowledge for teachers and teacher knowledge. Knowledge for teachers is about consuming a resource or securing a possession, such as teaching characteristics and teaching methods. Teacher knowledge is a form of knowledge embedded in teachers' identities and their stories to live by, and it is shaped through living. Anna's knowledge of what it means to be a teacher was evident in how she approached each diverse situation. What Anna knew in her life outside school was expressed in her moments with children in the classroom. Although the emphasis on teaching areas such as characteristics of friendliness, efficiency, and punctuality or methods such as lecture, seatwork, and drill were still evident in the school she taught at, it was clear that her teacher knowledge was shaping every aspect of her teaching.

The assumption in teacher knowledge research is that the most important area is what teachers know and how their knowing is expressed in teaching. On this assumption, teacher knowledge and knowing affects every aspect of the teaching act. It affects teachers' relationships with students; teachers' interpretations of subject matter and its importance in students' lives; teachers' treatment of ideas whether as fixed textbook

givens or as matters of inquiry and reflection; teachers' curriculum planning and evaluation of student progress; and so on. In short, it has only recently become commonplace to believe that what teachers know and how they express their knowledge is central to student learning.

(Connelly et al., 1997, p. 666)

Clandinin and Connelly (1995) conceptualized knowledge in a way that values what teachers know in both their personal and professional worlds. I understand Anna's knowledge in this way. Instead of seeing her as a conduit for applying theory to practice because of the stories she told, the conversation shifted to a place of speaking about Anna as a holder of personal practical knowledge. Bringing this conception of teacher knowledge to beginning-teacher experience shapes the way I see Anna making sense of tension-filled interactions as she negotiated the first 4 years of her professional career.

***Understanding intellectual work as a narrative knowledge activity.***

*Intellectual work* is the term I use to describe a teacher's making sense in diverse situations. Intellectual work is teacher knowledge in action; it is the act of using teacher knowledge to make sense in a situation. The intellectual acts of teaching are contextualized over time within all personal and professional experiences in a teacher's life. Each situation evolves from previous experience.

When Anna put her mukluks into her backpack before going into school each morning, she was sustaining a school narrative that had to do with what she and her peers wore to school. She knew how to sustain the plotline of acceptance

in high school, and she knew it was not a safe place to declare her Métis heritage. She also knew that to sustain familial plotlines, she chose to put the mukluks on again before she went into the front door of her house.

Sustaining a coherent story was about making an identity for Anna. Sustaining her stories to live by continued into her first professional teaching experience. When Anna's experiences as a beginning teacher diverged from her personal stories to live by, she narrated her experience as stories of tension and worked to make sense of the experiences. Anna engaged intellectually to sustain coherent stories to live by between personal and professional situations. In seeking to tell a coherent story to live by—putting her embodied knowledge into action in her classroom—she was engaged in intellectual work.

### **Imagining into the future.**

As Anna engaged in intellectual work during the first years of teaching, she reflected on experiences from her past to make sense of tension in curriculum-making moments. Simultaneously, she imagined who she would be in the future. The process of coming to an understanding of tension in new situations of curriculum making was a process of learning about her. As she worked to understand herself, she was also learning to understand the stories of others. Sarris (1993) pointed out that

in understanding another person and culture you must simultaneously understand yourself. The process is ongoing, an endeavour not aimed at a final and transparent understanding of the Other or of the self, but of

continued communication, at an ever-widening understanding of both. (p. 6)

This simultaneous understanding of self and other is part of intellectual work. Supporting intellectual work in the lives of teachers is essential for their composition of their professional stories to live by, particularly at the beginning of a career. Intellectual work—making sense of new situations as a way of adapting or shifting into a new surrounding—is significant in sustaining their stories to live by on the professional knowledge landscape. As beginning teachers examine their stories in their communities and classrooms, they come to a deeper understanding of teaching. They come to a deeper understanding of their own identity as a person and as a teacher.



## **Chapter Eight: Negotiating Personal and Professional Landscapes**

### **Living in the Midst of Intersecting Experiences**

Penny and Anna did not live out fixed stories to live by. When they were able to make sense of the interactions and social contexts around them, they composed stories to live by that allowed them to shift who they were. The story Penny told of herself finding a permanent teaching contract quickly after finishing her degree shifted into a story of substitute teaching. Anna's story of wanting to fit in shifted into spaces where she asserted her personal practical knowledge and chose what she thought was good for her students, rather than blindly following what her colleagues did. Creating spaces for teachers to shift who they are is an integral part of teacher education and sustaining teachers on the professional knowledge landscape. The work of opening spaces for teachers to compose and recompose who they are is significant for teacher education. Space for teachers to shift their stories to live by will sustain them and will be continuous work throughout their career. Composing who we are on the professional knowledge landscape is never finished.

This narrative inquiry focused on the experiences of two teachers, Anna and Penny, at the beginning of their careers. In this concluding chapter, I return to the research puzzle to summarize how they were sustained<sup>16</sup> as whole people in

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<sup>16</sup> Within the discourse around teacher attrition, sustaining beginning teachers (Schaefer, 2012; Schaefer, Long, & Clandinin, 2012; Schaefer & Clandinin, 2011; Young et al., 2010; Nelson, Antayá-Moore, Badley, & Coleman, 2010; Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009; Nieto, 2003; Estolla, 2003) rather than retaining them, opens the possibility for teachers at the beginning of their careers to feel fulfilled as contributing people. Focusing on shifting identity rather than

their entwined personal and professional knowledge landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).

Both women came to teaching with an embodied knowledge and imagined stories (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2011) of who they would be with children in classrooms. These stories had roots in their personal knowledge landscapes (Schaefer, Downey, & Clandinin, 2014) and shaped who they were in the professional knowledge landscape. The imagined plotlines they came to teaching with were frequently interrupted by the stories of others and stunted by dominant institutional narratives. On the other hand, when they claimed particular stories, sometimes others around them shifted their stories. Their knowledge and the knowledge of others was shaped in relationship.

Over the course of this research, there were many changes for both Anna and Penny on their personal and professional landscapes as they grew in the midst of tensions and bumping stories. Changes and shifts were ongoing. At the same time, there were many stories that they claimed. Settling into a new professional knowledge landscape was uncertain and challenging as they shifted or claimed stories and negotiated curriculum making between the diverse lives of teachers, children, and families.

### **Coming back to the research puzzles: making sense with stories.**

At the centre of this research are puzzles about how Anna and Penny made sense of uncertainties and tensions at the beginning of their professional careers.

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deferring to models of induction into a fixed role moves the conversation from retaining teachers to sustaining teachers on the professional-knowledge landscape.

Although they both saw themselves as teachers, in certain situations their ideas of what it means to be a teacher shifted. I inquired into their shifting identities during a time in history when “attrition is high for young teachers” (Guarino et al., 2006, p. 10). Focusing on attrition, dominant research literature has focused on mandated induction and mentoring processes that focus on problems and detriments to retain teachers in schools. My inquiry, along with other narrative inquirers (Schaefer & Clandinin, 2011; Schaefer et al., 2012), shifts attention from problems and detriments to a focus on the experiences that teachers bring with them at the beginning of their careers. As Long et al. (2012) suggest:

When the problem of how to retain and mentor beginning teachers for their “role” in schools is reframed as a matter of sustaining beginning teachers to develop newly emerging identities as people who teach children, questions around the support that beginning teachers value, biographical questions around teaching intentions, and questions around continuity of experience as beginning teachers transition from educational institutions to school landscapes become critical. (p. 22)

Instead of perpetuating models of induction into the role of teaching, school cultures might foster responsibility to sustain the entire school community.

As this inquiry has shown, considerations for sustaining teachers in the beginning of their careers includes attending to their personal knowledge.

Through understanding how they experience their new professional knowledge landscape, we are also learning about who they are as people outside of school.

Experiences lived on their personal landscapes have shaped their experiences on the professional landscape. Living and reliving who they are does not stop at the boundaries between personal and professional places. Anna's and Penny's stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) on both landscapes helped them make sense of new situations and contributed to their teacher knowledge.

### **Landscapes of living and re-living.**

The metaphor of landscape provides an opportunity to understand Anna and Penny's knowledge within the context of a whole life preceding and encompassing their new professional stories to live by. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) explain the landscape metaphor in the following way.

A landscape metaphor is particularly well suited to our purpose. It allows us to talk about space, place, and time. Furthermore, it has a sense of expansiveness and the possibility of being filled with diverse people, things, and events in different relationships. Understanding professional knowledge as comprising a landscape calls for a notion of professional knowledge as composed of a wide variety of components and influenced by a wide variety of people, places, and things. Because we see the professional knowledge landscape as composed of relationships among people, places, and things, we see it as both an intellectual and moral landscape. (pp. 4–5)

Anna and Penny lived on both their professional knowledge landscapes and their personal knowledge landscapes. Just as people adapt to their physical

landscapes, so too did Anna and Penny negotiate their knowledge landscapes, shifting and changing with the environment around them. Individuals with diverse experience interacted on their landscapes, creating complex and shifting ground. These diverse relationships with people and places shaped their lives as they composed stories to live by.

Clandinin and Connelly (1995) and Connelly and Clandinin (1999) conceptualized teacher knowledge and identity in narrative ways that I used to inquire into Anna's and Penny's experiences on both their professional knowledge landscapes and their personal knowledge landscapes. I paid particular attention to the way they made sense of tension. When their experiences on the professional knowledge landscape bumped with other stories, they became involved in the act of maintaining narrative coherence. This maintenance of narrative coherence over time garnered tension, and in these moments, Anna and Penny worked hard to sustain continuity. Often, Anna and Penny referred to experiences they had had to make sense of a new situation. For example, Anna's first response to situations of tension was to turn to other possibilities. As an adult looking back on her constant transitions, she storied herself as adept in forging new relationships because of the need to move throughout her childhood in response to her father's changing employment. These frequent shifts and interruptions also shaped a way of responding to tension-filled moments by imagining herself otherwise and in other places. Often, she did quit, move on, or bring contexts to an end. She frequently talked about alternatives she would like

to pursue. Throughout the first year of our conversations, she spoke often about leaving teaching to study medicine. In the following year, although she sustained her story of teacher by beginning graduate studies, she also transferred to another school in the division. The year after that, she continued to talk about leaving the classroom, while she continued her master's degree and opened a cafe with a business partner, all the while continuing to teach elementary school. Her narrative coherence included looking to alternative possibilities, and she continuously lived at the edges of a story to leave by (Clandinin et al., 2009) in relation to school. Looking to alternative possibilities was part of the personal practical knowledge she used on both her personal and professional knowledge landscapes.

*Personal practical knowledge* is a term Connelly and Clandinin (1988) developed to describe teacher knowledge. They described teachers as holders of embodied knowledge. Personal practical knowledge is a moral, affective, and aesthetic way of knowing that comes from people's past, present, and future experiences, and this knowing is evident in their practice as teachers. Personal practical knowledge begins with personal knowledge.

### **Personal knowledge landscape.**

Anna's and Penny's teaching careers began on their personal knowledge landscapes long before they came to their first professional employment. These experiences on their personal knowledge landscapes occurred in familial places and shaped their reasons for the choices they made in their lives. Through

experiences with family and community, they came to know something about who they were and how they wanted to be in life. Relationships between people and places and the way they interacted shaped their experiences on the personal knowledge landscape. These experiences translated into embodied knowledge for Anna and Penny, which they relived in multiple ways in their classrooms with children, families, and colleagues in schools. The threads I carry forward into this paper are grounded in acknowledgement that teachers at the beginning of their careers are knowers and come to their professional knowledge landscapes with narratives that are formed on their personal knowledge landscapes.

### **Professional knowledge landscape.**

The professional knowledge landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) is a storied landscape used to understand teacher knowledge. It is “composed of relationships among people, places and things” and is both “an intellectual and a moral landscape” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 5). It consists of two different places, the “in-classroom place and the out-of-classroom place” (p. 2).

The out-of-classroom place is where researchers, policy makers, administrators, and others funnel strategies for implementation into the school system for the purpose of affecting what goes on in the lives of children and teachers in their classrooms. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) wrote about the out-of-classroom place as:

A place filled with knowledge funneled into the school system for the purpose of altering teachers' and children's classroom lives. Teachers talk about this knowledge all the time. We all refer to "what's coming down the pipe"; "what's coming down now"; "what will they throw down on us next". In these metaphorical expressions, we hear teachers express their knowledge of their out-of-classroom places as a place littered with imposed prescriptions. It is a place filled with other people's visions of what is right for children. (p. 2)

Both Anna and Penny collided with this institutional narrative of imposed policies for adults to implement with children. They told stories of trying to implement all the mandates in the midst of life in their in-classroom places. From their experiences in university, both teachers understood life in classrooms to be inquiry based and relational. However, when they found themselves in classrooms with children, emphasis on achieving strong scores on standardized tests surprised them. While it was not central to her practice, Penny was willing to assume this testing culture and knowledge for teachers as part of her new role. Anna resisted prescriptions related to testing and mandated outcomes in research conversations, but usually shifted her story to fit the institution until she felt confident enough to claim her embodied knowledge to re-live the situation differently with children in the classroom. Out-of-classroom places were places where knowledge for teachers was assumed. Anna and Penny experienced knowledge for teachers in the form of assigned student outcomes in the



curriculum guide and mandated provincial assessments that they were expected to implement. They bumped into expectations that families and children in their classrooms held for them in their roles as teachers, and stories that experienced teachers held as knowledge for them to adopt as their own were imposed mandates that littered their first 4 years of practice. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) continued by saying that “researchers, policy makers, senior administrators and others, using various implementation strategies, push research findings, policy statements, plans, improvement schemes and so on down what we call the conduit into this out-of-classroom place on the professional knowledge landscape” (p. 2). These out-of-classroom places, where others outside the classroom decided what was best for teachers and children, were often bumping places for both Anna and Penny; however, Penny tended to accept the knowledge to be accepted into the knowledge landscape, and this acceptance mattered less to Anna.

Stories pushed down the conduit were not only policy and research findings. Sometimes knowledge for teachers came as stories embedded in spoken and unspoken larger narratives. Anna resisted these stories that others tried to give her. When she encountered a situation in a graduate level class where a colleague expressed questions about three children in her classroom, Anna noticed the teacher spoke of ethnicity in relation to the Métis child but did not mention the heritage of the other children. She articulated strong rejection to the

stereotypes she presumed her colleague was carrying. Her response was situated in her own personal knowledge landscape when she responded:

Not all half-breed mothers provide an environment where men come and go and they get pregnant. Not all half-breed mothers provide an environment where they go see their family and come back with lice. Not all half-breed mothers provide an environment where their children don't attend school regularly. I don't know why we have to tag kids before we get to know them as people. (Excerpt from research conversation, February 12, 2010)

It is uncertain what the colleague's response was to Anna's words or if the colleague's concerns were situated in relation to the child's Métis identity.

Regardless, Anna assumed it was, and her response illustrates her own personal knowledge based on previous experiences regarding the familial narratives given to Aboriginal children. Underlying her response was something suggestive in the way she told the story. Her use of the word "half-breed" suggested a deliberate attempt to jolt the people she was talking with to disturb the conversation of labelling. The use of the term "half-breed" would be considered unacceptable if Anna were not Métis herself. The story of "not all half-breed mothers" was also Anna's story. When she called for a shift in the storying of the children, she was also calling for a shift in her own story.

The in-classroom place can be described as a place where knowledge of teachers is practiced. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) described the in-classroom place as follows:

Classrooms are, for the most part, safe places, generally free from scrutiny, where teachers are free to live stories of practice. These lived stories are essentially secret ones. Furthermore, when these secret lived stories are told, they are, for the most part, told to other teachers in other secret places. When teachers move out of their classrooms onto the out-of-classroom places on the landscape, they often live and tell cover stories, stories in which they portray themselves as experts, certain characters whose teacher stories fit within the acceptable range of the story of school being lived in the school. Cover stories enable teachers whose teacher stories are marginalized by whatever the current story of school is to continue to practice and to sustain their teacher stories. (p. 3)

Anna told cover stories to fit in with the other teachers, while her secret story was that she did not agree with much of what was prescribed. Penny lived the cover story of strength in the midst of substitute teaching. Her secret story, told in safe places to safe people, was that being a substitute teacher caused her great tension, and she did not see herself as nor wish to be a substitute teacher. The cover stories that Anna and Penny told protected the stories shaped on the professional knowledge landscape, which was where their stories to live by occurred as they took up a teaching life.

**A story can be told a thousand different ways.**

Both Anna and Penny were children when they first started telling the story of themselves as teachers. Their identity shifted and changed in gradual ways as intellect and experience sustained an imagined story of what it meant to be a teacher. Their lives, composed over time, were ongoing processes with life stories that were “lived and told, retold and relived” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 246) of what it meant to be a teacher. Their imagined stories of what it meant to be a teacher shifted into many different livings. Each shift began with an interruption and moved forward into endings and new beginnings. In a rhythm of beginnings and endings, pieces of their story dissolved away, inviting imagined possibilities of a shifted story.

Penny chose to sustain certain stories of what it meant to be a teacher and let go of others. One story she worked to sustain was linked to an overarching story of success in her family. Her family members told and retold the story of being successful professional people—doctors, lawyers, models, and authors. Penny measured herself against these stories of success. In her early 20s, as a camp counsellor, she claimed the story of teacher and decided to enroll in university classes for an education degree. She achieved high academic standings in her classes and expected to find a full-time teaching contract in the city of her choice immediately after her graduation. However, after 2 years as a substitute teacher, she came to a point where she decided to choose between finding alternative work in the city where she and her fiancé James lived and pursuing a

teaching position away from him outside the city. Even though she felt shame for how her family might view her leaving teaching, it was less painful for her to imagine leaving her story of teaching employment than leaving James.

Dissolving, imagining, and the complex intellectual work of moving forward into a reformed living created openings for her to shift her story. She could imagine herself letting go of her story of being a teacher, but she could not let go of her story of a life with James.

When Anna and Penny approached tension as indicators of endings within their stories to live by, they let go of stories they had been saving. Letting go—endings—while necessary for new beginnings were not always easy. Change, letting go of what you know, is complex. The process of letting go and holding on to stories invited multiple ways of changing course.

Anna worked on letting go of institutional stories in her classroom and in her practice. She talked about a project she did with her students and how she encouraged them to let go of their reliance on her as the expert. She referred to herself as only one person in the classroom. She worked hard to help her students let go of the expert story to recognize their own knowledge. She worked hard to help them let go of their story so that she could release herself from being the expert. She explained with the following story:

On Friday we were working on their flip-books. We each made one with our favourite children's book. We made up the criteria together: together we decided it had to have a title, author, illustrator, your name on the

cover page—other than that, do whatever you like. Yet they were constantly coming up to me and saying, “What should I do,” “Is this OK” . . . so much that I finally told them to freeze . . . and I said, “I don’t know what’s going on in your minds . . . it’s February . . . you know the criteria . . . tell me what’s going on . . . why are you asking for my opinion? We have created criteria together . . . now it’s up to you. I have been saying since August that if the particular way of representing something isn’t your thing . . . like if you hate flip-books, then find another way. Come to me with your ideas. As long as it meets the criteria, you can represent your ideas in a different way. You need to talk to your peers . . . get advice from them . . . I am one person.” So they said, “We have always had teachers who have told us exactly what to do.” They had never created criteria. They have always been given the criteria . . . usually written on the board or just verbally . . . maybe on a handout . . . but they were expected to remember it and then do what they are told. And I often say to them, “Go back to your criteria.” That shed some light for me. This is new for them. They are not used to having their voices matter.

(Excerpt from research conversation, February 12, 2010)

Realizing her students were in a place of uncertainty, Anna did not give in or change her expectations for classroom curriculum making. She acknowledged the tension for them and moved on without judgment. Anna claimed this story of curriculum making and confidently relaxed into making space for children. As

she shifted the children's story of teacher, they also made space for her to shift her own story.

With each shift, Anna and Penny moved into new possibilities of how to tell their stories of being teachers. There were always multiple stories going on at the same time in their lives, and these were entwined with different ways of telling each experience. Each improvised choice involved a reliving of the personal into the professional within their overarching commitment to their stories of being teachers.

**Living and shifting the story of teaching.**

Anna and Penny lived in the midst of negotiating shifting stories as they simultaneously worked to align their experiences on their personal knowledge landscapes with the practical professional knowledge landscapes they encountered at school. When their narrative unity (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988; Kerby, 1981) was interrupted, they negotiated tension between the multiplicity of people and experiences that met in the moment. These negotiations led to their own shifts as well as the shifts of others' stories.

***Living and shifting the story of teaching with saving stories.***

When Anna's narratives collided with the stories of others and with grand narratives of school, she felt tension. As she made sense of the tension, she told particular stories over and over. King (2003) suggests that there are some stories we tell repeatedly, and in this sense they are stories that we have saved. Furthermore, in the act of retelling these saved stories, we possibly save

ourselves. King calls these saving stories. For Anna, saving stories were both stories to save and be saved by. Familial saving stories, saving stories about the land, and saving stories shaped by her Métis heritage were embodied in her practice as a teacher in a classroom with children. Saving stories can be sustaining stories. These stories helped her sustain a coherent sense of self in relation to her shifting professional story. They were stories that she held in her memory and claimed in her living of practice. These stories that she saved reminded her of who she was in the midst of a shifting identity. Saving stories and stories that she saved became sustaining stories. Stories that Anna saved and embodied were practiced in her classroom and sustained her on the professional knowledge landscape.

***Living and shifting the story of teaching through world travel.***

Living and reliving happened when Anna and Penny travelled to the worlds of other people where stories bumped. Sometimes, when Anna's and Penny's stories to live by collided with the stories of others around them, they shifted their own stories to fit with the story of the other. Belonging was a story they both lived by. To belong in their new world of school, they sometimes sacrificed their personal knowledge. Other times they travelled to another's world and held on to their stories from their personal knowledge landscapes.

Anna told the story of colliding stories at Christmastime in which some children came from traditions that celebrated the holiday and others did not. When a parent challenged her to hold a gift exchange and decorate the classroom



with a Christmas tree, Anna felt tension but sustained her story of being in relationship to all her students. She responded to the collision in a way that she had learned from her mother. Anna responded with a familiar story of standing up for the other as her mother had done for children who did not have lunch at school. In this case, her personal world informed her practical world in the classroom.

The process of coming to understand their students within a curriculum-making process was also a process of learning about themselves. As Anna and Penny worked to make sense of uncertainties in their classrooms, they also came to understand the stories of themselves. The children and families in Anna's classroom shaped this negotiation as much as she did. Sarris (1993) pointed out that

In understanding another person and culture you must simultaneously understand yourself. The process is ongoing, an endeavor not aimed at a final and transparent understanding of the Other or of the self, but of continued communication, at an ever-widening understanding of both. (p. 6)

Through time and experience, Anna came to an ever-widening understanding of the others around her in overlapping professional and personal worlds. In negotiating this understanding, she was telling and shaping a story of who she was and who she was becoming, while at the same time negotiating with children and families in her classroom who she was being.

The collisions between worlds were sometimes educative and sometimes miseducative (Dewey, 1938) for Anna. When collisions between diverse stories allowed her to grow from the point of meeting, she sustained her identity as teacher. When her stories remained frozen or when she felt the stories of others were frozen without room for her own personal stories, she moved away from an identity as a teacher.

***Shifting a personal story to live by into teaching.***

Understanding identity in narrative terms helps us see how Anna and Penny both wanted to share who they were in their curriculum-making moments with children in classrooms. They wanted to sustain their own personal stories to live by in their professional practical places. Like their students, they came to the classroom with knowledge derived from experiences outside school.

Penny's intention was to obtain a full-time contract in the city where she lived within the first few months after finishing her education degree at university. This plotline was interrupted because she chose to stay in the city, where positions were scarce, and subsequently, she spent her first 3 years as a substitute teacher. The other plotline that was interrupted for her was in her relational work with children. As a substitute teacher, she was not able to develop individual relationships with children in a single classroom, and she found herself making choices in the classroom that did not fit with who she intended to be as a teacher.

Penny chose to tell one aspect of her story through a narrative of relational curriculum making based on a familial understanding. It was important to her that she knew her students closely. Her family, especially her mother, inspired the thread of relational responsibility within their familial narrative. As a substitute teacher, she was not able to tell the story of relationship in the way that she imagined she would as a permanent contract teacher, and institutional stories interrupted her family-inspired story to live by. Penny reflected on the way she attended to relational responsibility with her students in the following anecdote. The children who met her on the playground were children she thought she had been “just nagging all day. A day of ‘Be quiet. Sit down. Open your book. Blah, blah, blah’” (Research conversation, Jan. 17, 2011). Yet, as we see in the following field text, there was something underlying her relationship with these children that affirmed her knowing that she was not finished with them. They were holding a space open for her to be in relationship with them. Penny described that moment of meeting on the playground in the following way:

It’s important to not lose sight of who you are. If you do then you are not going to be able to be as present in the situation. Like I saw some kids from Elm Grove School the other day. They were my favourite class last year. I have been in that school several times since the beginning of the year, but in the junior end. So I haven’t really seen a lot of them. So then when I saw them, they were like “Oh, Miss Garrison!” and I thought, *I really did have a relationship with them.* And I was thinking that lately I

haven't been myself as much. I haven't been building those relationships with the kids as much as I used to in my practice. I haven't been making the . . . I don't know how to explain it. It's like . . . I just feel so emotionally exhausted." (Research conversation, February 13, 2011)

Penny recognized a shift in her practice as she reflected on the given anecdote. She had made small choices along the way that she thought were not fitting with her overarching story to live by of relational responsibility to her students. She imagined that close relationships with children were dependent on constant contact. Evidently, the moments of curriculum making shared with these children were enough to elicit a response of relationship in their greeting. In this moment, Penny shifted her understanding of how relationships with children might be sustained. This was a significant shift in her professional knowledge. This shifted her idea that to have a relationship with students she needed to pay attention to everything they said or did. She accepted a shifting story in this situation but not in the following story. In this moment with these children, Penny was able to shift.

More than anything else, she wanted to stay in the city where she received her teaching degree. After a childhood of moving frequently for her father's work, Penny now chose to stay in one place. She reminded herself frequently of the importance of place, and this helped sustain her each day as a substitute; however, it also pushed her to a place of knowing that if she didn't get a full-time permanent position where she wanted, she would not stay with the profession. It

was not hard for her to decide what and where she wanted her teaching life to be. Relationships with students and staying in her home city were her primary intentions. For Penny, what was hard was figuring out what she was willing to give up in order to do the things she really cared about.

Penny decided that her state of emotional exhaustion needed to be interrupted. To change this feeling of exhaustion, she gave up part-time employment and the financial security it provided so that she could put all her energy into substitute teaching and looking for permanent contract work. This meant letting go of the narrative thread shaped around financial responsibility, a narrative thread she had held since her childhood.

***Shifting the story of teaching as intellectual work.***

Schaefer and Clandinin (2011) inquired into the imagined stories that beginning teachers brought to their first experiences in the classroom and suggested that their participants' personal and professional knowledge landscapes were inseparable. Between the intellectual work of the stories and knowledge they bring to their first teaching experiences is the intellectual work of transitioning between personal knowledge landscapes and professional knowledge landscapes. Anna and Penny came to their first teaching positions with experiences and imagined stories of how they would be that shaped who they were as teachers in the classroom. Their knowledge included personal practical knowledge as they used embodied knowledge from their personal landscapes to make sense of new situations they encountered in their classrooms. This use of

embodied knowledge to make sense of tension on the professional knowledge landscape was a form of intellectual work.

Intellectual work is personal practical knowledge in action. It is the term I use to describe how Anna and Penny thought *with* stories (Morris, 2001) from their personal knowledge landscapes and, increasingly, from their professional knowledge landscapes in order to make sense of new and diverse experiences in their classrooms. For Anna, intellectual work included sustaining a narrative plotline from which she made decisions for and with her students. Anna used stories from her personal knowledge landscape to make sense of uncertainties in her experiences in a new career. She spoke of the conversations she had in graduate school as something that sustained her in her daily work with children in classrooms. She said, “There were moments that I didn’t want to be part of any of it anymore, and yet the conversation and the possibilities are what sustained me. Conversation around the table and the attitude of possibility sustained me” (Research Conversation, April 25, 2011). The conversation around the table in her night class was a safe space alongside other teachers where she could make sense of bumping stories that occurred in her classroom. She could talk with other people who came from diverse experiences about curriculum making with children. It was a place where she could explore her stories from her personal knowledge landscape as they bumped with stories on the professional knowledge landscape.

When Anna's experiences as a beginning teacher diverged from her personal narrative plotline, she narrated her school experience in stories of tension and worked to make sense of the situation. Other teachers in her graduate courses listened to her bumping stories and shared their own experiences, which resonated and clashed with hers. As she listened and learned from other teachers, she was also learning about herself. When her plotline was interrupted in conversations around the university graduate class table, the attitude of possibility and the safety she felt relationally in that place allowed her to create forward-looking stories and sustained her in daily curriculum making with children and the diversity of lives in her classroom. Anna's intellectual work included conversations in safe places with people she could bump with in an attitude of possibilities.

Penny spoke about passion as intellectual work. For her, passion was strong intellectual engagement that was lived out in experience. Penny expected passion to sustain her on the professional knowledge landscape. She said:

It's interesting to listen to someone who has passion about something . . . anything . . . it could be beekeeping. They are passionate about and it would only be interesting because they were passionate about it. But after this year of subbing—it's just so never ending and I don't feel as passionate about teaching as I used to. For me passion means all or nothing. If I am going to do something, I really want to do it. I will put everything into it. . . . You have to be immersed in the experience in order for it to be at a level of passion. You need to actually be doing it, not just

thinking about doing it. (Interim text based on research conversation, July 2011)

Penny expected that she would be practicing teaching with a full-time contract with a specific classroom of children. For her, passion and intellectual work included engagement on all levels. Simply thinking about teaching full-time was not enough to sustain her story of teacher. When a full-time permanent contract was not an option, she experienced tension because she could not see another way to live her story as teacher. At that point, she looked to her personal knowledge landscape and chose a different story to live by.

#### **Forward looking stories.**

Looking back at what I have learned from Anna and Penny, I also look forward to ways teacher education and those on the various landscapes contribute to sustaining beginning teachers on the professional knowledge landscape.

#### ***Negotiating interruptions to narrative coherence.***

Negotiating interruptions to a beginning teacher's personal knowledge narrative plotline is significant in sustaining them on the professional knowledge landscape. Earlier in this dissertation I wrote,

Intellectual work is teacher knowledge in action; it is the act of using teacher knowledge to make sense in a situation. The intellectual acts of teaching are contextualized over time within all personal and professional experiences in a teacher's life. Each situation evolves from previous experience. (Chapter seven)



Anna's and Penny's intellectual work of achieving narrative coherence between who they imagined they would be on both their professional and personal knowledge landscapes was situated in stories of relationship. Particular people on each of their personal knowledge landscapes shaped safe spaces for them to talk about their professional landscape in order to help them make sense of their bumping stories. Both Anna and Penny spoke with their mothers numerous times each week and referred to these conversations as safe spaces to make sense between the personal and professional landscapes. They were sustained on the professional knowledge landscape through relationships on their personal knowledge landscapes.

Teaching occurs simultaneously on and between personal and professional knowledge landscapes. Understanding this should shift what we do in teacher education. If we acknowledge that there will be colliding stories that interrupt a teacher's narrative coherence in his or her first 5 years of teaching, we will be compelled to prepare pre-service teachers in teacher education programs for living relationally between stories that collide.

***Making room for beginning teachers as knowledgeable people.***

There is a necessary shift required in the grand narratives currently shaping schools to include teachers at the beginning of their careers as knowledgeable people. Anna and Penny came to the professional knowledge landscape with narratives that were already in motion. These narratives were situated in an embodied knowing based on experience. As they began to speak

and explore the stories that bumped with the stories of others, they were learning about themselves and the complexities of what it meant to be a teacher. Other teachers, administrators, parents, and children were part of experiences that were both educative and mis-educative processes for them. What we can learn from Anna and Penny in this regard is the importance of creating educative spaces where growth happens in safe spaces as a relational process among all the players—teachers, children, parents, and administrators.

Questions about preparing teacher candidates for the collision of stories between people and their various landscapes prior to their first teaching contract might offer opportunities for them to imagine multiple forward looking stories rather than single stories when tension arises. Exploring how children, parents, administrators, policy makers, family, and friends make room for beginning-teacher knowledge is vital. I wonder what would happen if narrative coherence was attended to in the lives of beginning teachers as they made shifts on professional knowledge landscapes. I wonder if their relationships, perspectives, and awareness of their stories to live by would be broadened. Teachers, as “holders and makers of knowledge” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 1), might shape possibilities for beginning teachers’ personal practical knowledge and shifting identities.

One possibility is to create space for teachers at the beginning of their careers to recognize themselves within the relational work of teaching and how the stories they have lived by on their personal knowledge landscapes shaped their

identities as teachers. As they tell their complex and multiperspectival stories and listen to the experiences of others, they will form forward-looking stories as possible re-livings they will embody in their practice on professional knowledge landscapes. By making space and community for them to share the stories from their personal worlds that shaped them as teachers, we also make space for them to share the stories of collisions in a way that may lead to reliving. Anna's and Penny's lives were a living, telling, reliving, and retelling, to themselves, children in their classrooms, to colleagues, to families in their schools, and on their personal knowledge landscapes—the narrative of what they were about and who they were. They worked to sustain a narrative thread throughout their lives that held the fabric of who they were together. By attending to and valuing beginning teachers' narrative threads, which hold their lives together, we may possibly offer openings for them to sustain possibilities of knowing themselves as teachers.

**Packing for the future: instructions.**

Take the thickest socks.

Wherever you are going

You'll have to walk.

There may be water.

There may be stones.

There may be high places

you cannot go without

the hope socks bring you,  
the way they hold you  
to the earth.

At least one pair must be new,  
must be blue as a wish  
hand-knit by your mother  
in her sleep.

\*

Take a leather satchel,  
a velvet bag and an old tin box –  
a salamander painted on the lid.

This is to carry that small thing  
you cannot leave. Perhaps the key  
you've kept though it doesn't fit  
any lock you know,  
the photograph that keeps you sane,  
a ball of string to lead you out  
though you can't walk back  
into that light.

In your bag leave room for sadness,  
leave room for another language.

There may be doors nailed shut.  
There may be painted windows.  
There may be signs that warn you  
to be gone. Take the dream  
you've been having since  
you were a child, the one  
with open fields and the wind  
sounding.

\*

Mistrust no one who offers you  
water from a well, a songbird's feather,  
something that's been mended twice.  
Always travel lighter  
than the heart.

(Crozier, 1999)

Writing the last words of this dissertation brings me back to the narrative beginning I shared earlier. There is space to move forward now that I have considered my narrative beginning in relation to this inquiry. Like Anna and Penny, I take with me stories from my personal and professional life. I take up

the tension of trying to practice loving perception even when this is not always an easy thing to do. The stories of Anna and Penny are models for me that provide a context to lay alongside my own narratives of experience. I have worked at sustaining certain stories and recognize these are stories that also sustain me. Some stories I have let go of and some stories I am still learning to let go of. This is how I understand the fluid nature of saving stories and a teaching life in the making.

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