Teachers' Experiences of Negotiating Stories to Stay By: A Narrative Inquiry

by

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**Abstract**

Research exploring teacher experiences remains significant for informing teacher education, teacher induction, and teacher professional development initiatives. This narrative inquiry began with a wonder about how the experiences teachers have in their induction years continue to influence their teacher identities and practice. How do teachers who stay negotiate competing demands on their time? How do they story those times, be they moments or months, when they cannot be the teacher they have in mind? To explore these wonders I invited three teachers in their seventh to tenth year of teaching to join me in a narrative inquiry. Over the course of one calendar year and two school years, we met for a total of six research conversations over dinner. During these conversations we developed and explored two concepts that described significant experiences in the lives of Serena, Mara, and Carlos (their self-selected pseudonyms). We explored the ways in which teachers experience contact hours, and the ways in which the weight of those hours is increasing, in conversations about "heavy hours" (Chapter 3). We also explored the daily decisions Carlos, Serena, and Mara made "not to break," and the ways in which living out and living with these decisions shaped their stories to stay by (Chapter 4). While analyzing collected field texts (including audio recordings of our meetings, email exchanges, collages, and annals), I noticed that what these experiences have in common is the residue they leave behind, residue that continues to influence identity and practice in important ways (Chapter 5). The purpose of this dissertation is to first share some of those teaching experiences most significant to Mara, Serena, and Carlos, and then to begin a discussion about what those understandings might mean for education communities.

## Preface

The research project, of which this dissertation is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board. Project Name "Stories to Stay By," Pro00034399, January 17, 2013.

This dissertation has employed a paper-based format and includes an introductory chapter and four individual manuscripts, which have, with the exception of Chapter 2, been submitted to peer-reviewed journals for publication.

This work is an original work by Jaime Leigh Beck.

**Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my research friends Carlos, Mara, and Serena, and to the many teachers like them who meet the challenges of teaching with thoughtfulness and courage. Thank you for sharing your stories with me.

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# Chapter 1

**The Research Puzzle: A History**

I am curious about how the experiences teachers have in their induction years continue to influence their teacher identities and practice. This statement of research puzzle is *a* beginning to my doctoral inquiry project, but is not the only beginning. I could begin with my master's inquiry; or before then, with the first time I inquired into the experiences of beginning teachers with my beginning teacher colleagues; or with the first time we presented the insights we gained; or earlier, with the beginning of my Bachelor of Education program; or with my Bachelor of Arts in English; or even before then, with my enduring love for stories, for teaching, and for learning. Each of these other stories, these past experiences, continue in some way to guide and shape this narrative inquiry. So, my statement of research puzzle is *a* beginning, but one in need of some history.

I entered a full time master's program after two years of teaching high school English. My position as a high school English teacher immediately followed my Bachelor of Education program and represented the most formal teaching position I had ever held. I taught English courses set aside for students experiencing learning or behavioural challenges. I enjoyed this "set-asidedness" of our group; together we formed a smaller community within the larger high school, and my relationships with those students were rewarding and meaningful. Yet despite these rich relationships, and despite having grown up knowing that, for me, teaching is a way of being, I did not love the whole of this teaching experience as much as I had wanted or expected. At the same time, it was hard to imagine doing anything else…except perhaps, for a master's program.

One of the professors in my Bachelor of Education program had suggested that if I was considering returning for a master's degree, then I should apply after two years of professional experience. This suggestion had taken hold in my mind and grown into a deadline, and because of this I sent in an application during my second year of teaching without any deep thoughts as to the outcome. I had no idea what I would do if offered a spot in the program; graduate school was never something I imagined for myself. When my acceptance letter came however, I was undergoing treatment for thyroid cancer. This experience left me drained of the few physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual resources that remained after my first two years of teaching. I accepted the offer.

At some point during the first semester of my master's program, once I regained some energy, I realized that in order to start graduate school, I had quit my teaching job – I left teaching! I spent a lot of time grieving this loss, and a lot of time being confused about my experiences. I thought back to the first day of my Teacher Education program when we had been told that five years after graduation, only half of our class would still be teaching. I remember feeling certain that I would not be part of that half: I was passionate and committed, and even though I had *been* a teacher throughout my life, I had still taken some time after my first degree to travel and teach overseas and to be sure about my decision. Throughout my Bachelor of Education program I was very successful in both course work and practica. I felt (and feel) intellectually, creatively, personally, and professionally at home in Education. Yet I could not deny that I had left the classroom, and this decision had worrying implications. From what I understood at the time, in the grand narrative of teaching, *staying* is one way others define a good teacher: "Teachers who leave teaching early, like youth who leave school prior to graduation,

know that from within the dominant institutional narrative, they will be seen as 'deficient,' as having something wrong with them" (Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009, p. 146). The master's program I had entered was a Theatre Education program as I had proposed a curriculum project based on a well-known Canadian play. While I loved my theatre project and dove in almost immediately, I also began to take opportunities to explore this phenomenon called "teacher attrition." I wanted to know what others had to say about their experiences, what the literature had to say, and mostly, I wanted to understand what had happened to me, what I could do about it, and how I could prevent "it" from happening to other good teachers. At the very least, perhaps I could find something to help me defend against the assumption that "good" teachers are not the ones leaving the classroom.

**Teacher attrition.** Though narratives of teacher attrition have recently become more easily found in the literature (see for example Craig, 2014; Harfitt, 2015; Schaefer, 2013), at the time I found very little in the way of teacher narratives in my search; there was little that shared the experiences of other beginning teachers. What I did find, I felt rather surprised by. First, the literature confirms what I had been told that long ago day, "that between 40% and 50% of new teachers leave within the first 5 years of entry into teaching" (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011, p. 202). Though more recent studies trouble this statistic (Kutsyuruba & Tregunna, 2014; Long et al., 2012), there remains agreement across international contexts that the rate of early career teacher attrition is problematically high (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015), and is not all considered "healthy" attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2008). High teacher turnover prevents teachers from becoming experts in their field (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008). School community

suffers as working relationships are strained (Brill & McCartney, 2008). Student achievement is negatively affected as teacher effectiveness represents one of the most significant influences for student success (Brewster & Railsback, 2001; Brill & McCartney, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2000). I was surprised because despite the awareness in the literature of these costs and others, beginning teachers often enter the profession amidst conditions described as "trial-by-fire," "sink-or-swim," a "hazing," or even as "boot-camp" experiences (Anhorn, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2003; R.M. Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Kutsyuruba & Tregunna, 2014). These conditions make it difficult for beginning teachers to feel successful in their beginning years (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Persistent feelings of failure, combined with the low pay and low prestige of teaching, lead many towards attrition from the system, particularly in the United States, where most of the research into teacher attrition has been done (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Guarino, Santibañez, & Daley, 2006; Hahs-Vaughn & Scherff, 2008). In terms of suggestions for preventing attrition, I learned that while induction and mentorship initiatives continue to become more common (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Carter & Francis, 2001; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), the "enthusiasm for new teacher induction has not always been matched by clarity regarding the purposes and processes of educative induction practices" (Cherian & Daniel, 2008, p. 1). This prompted me to officially adopt teacher attrition as the topic of my master's thesis. I understood that policy makers, school leaders, and other members of the education community require "richer understandings of the meanings of new teacher induction… to create purposeful and effective induction programs and policies" (Feiman-Nemser, 2010, p. 27). Perhaps more importantly to me, was that for other beginning teachers like myself, who are

surprised or even heartbroken to find they are considering leaving a profession they love, hearing the stories of others who have left might provide some insight, if not also some support. The inquiry that followed informs my current approach, therefore I will briefly describe the process of my thesis work entitled *Breaking the silence: Beginning teachers share pathways out of the profession* (Beck, 2010).

**Master's inquiry.** I began by continuing to explore my experiences through autobiographical writing. I wrote story after story, and through a process of reflecting, writing, and reading and re-reading my writing, I sought to "see more clearly [myself] in relation to [my] circumstances, past and present, and to understand those relationships and their implications more deeply" (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009, p. 31). While this exploration went on in private, to others I had a difficult time admitting that teacher attrition had become my research focus. I believed that studying teacher attrition might imply that I had left the classroom permanently. Clandinin, Downey, and Huber (2009) identify graduate studies as one of the few "acceptable story plotlines to leave teaching" (p. 146), and during the process of leaving my school, my colleagues had accepted this "cover story" (p. 146) without question. Crites (1979) defined "cover stories" as an act of self-deception, something we tell others as well as ourselves: "A person has two images or scenarios in mind, the one so unacceptable – so unflattering or heart-breaking, … that the other image or scenario is artfully fabricated in order to suppress it" (p. 126). Clandinin and Connelly (1996) expand Crites' definition to include context as a reason why cover stories are necessary: "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. 25). When I look back, I realize that I

accepted my cover story of graduate school without question, for a time at least. This helped me to maintain my good teacher story, someone for whom teaching was a way of being. I worried that if the "current story of school," the one where good teachers are those who stay in the classroom, was true after all, then I would lose my identity. As I left teaching, no one implied that graduate school was not a good reason to leave the classroom; it was an assumed "upward trajectory toward a happy and known ending" (Clandinin et al., 2009, p. 146). In graduate school however, I needed new cover stories as the questions were not about why I had left, that was self-evident, the questions were about whether or not I would return to the K-12 classroom. To this question I responded either vaguely, or, with those whom I felt particularly vulnerable, I answered that I would. Inwardly, I felt uncertain.

This difference between my private thoughts and my conversations with others brought a new question; why could I write things I could not speak? I began an intentional exploration of those parts of my story that were silent. I agree with Clandinin, Downey, and Huber (2009) who contend that if:

> teachers' stories to leave by were not covered over and if we were
>
> making spaces for teachers to tell of their shifts from stories to live
>
> by to stories to leave by and of the pain and sadness of that shift, we
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> imagine we might, as Eliot (1874) wrote, "die of that roar which lies
>
> on the other side of silence." (p. 147)

I explored the silences of my stories visually by creating a series of images inspired by the format of *PostSecret* (Warren, 2005), a blog and a series of books dedicated to creating a space for anonymous secrets sent by mail in the form of postcards. My secrets

were related to my experiences of teaching, and of leaving teaching. They ranged from memories of the day-to-day life I experienced as a beginning teacher, for example, "I sometimes had to call in sick to catch up on my marking" (Beck, 2010, p. 67), to deeper worries about the sense of failure I had internalized and was trying to defend against, for example, "I worry that when I read my narrative of teacher attrition, I will see that it was my fault" (p. 24). I wrote these secrets across torn out pages of a monthly publication of the local Teachers' Association. I noticed that although the same themes my secrets touched upon were ever present in the dominant discourse of Education, the public dialogue of teachers was "embedded in the silence that surrounds it" existing "on a page that is otherwise blank and whose blankness lets black print emerge" (Neumann, 1997, p. 108). That is, the space between the lines was the space where my story was, it was silenced, only certain approved teacher stories were coming through in print.

The next stage of my inquiry process was to invite other teachers who had left teaching, whether permanently or temporarily, within their first five years to join me in an inquiry process. Katherine, Nora, (both pseudonyms) and I began a conversation that was free from any need for cover stories as we gathered for two days of dialogue and conversation about our experiences. In preparation for our gathering, I shared my autobiographical writing as well as the visuals of teacher secrets I had created. I invited Nora and Katherine to write as well, and to share this writing or not. During our conversations, it was the visuals that prompted the richest discussion, and we fell into a process of discussing each one until there was a natural break, at which point we would choose another. These two days were characterized by a productive and genuine attempt at understanding our experiences as beginning teachers, it was a space that allowed for a

"possibility for understanding how the personal and social are entwined over time in [our] lives … [how our] individual experiences are shaped by the larger social, cultural and institutional narratives within which [we] live" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 51). We were more free to explore our stories to live by and leave by, and to embrace a more "tentative knowing" of these stories, "preserving a sense that the story could be told otherwise" (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, p. 223). During the writing process I gained insight into those wonders I set out to explore, but I also found new wonders that invited further exploration. As Richardson (1997) articulates, writing itself is inquiry, one where we learn things we did not know before. One of the most confronting details I discovered while writing was the realization that I knew very little about those who stay in teaching. As a beginning teacher, overwhelmed by a culture shock which Britzman (1991) describes as "the realization of the overwhelming complexity of the teacher's work and the myriad ways this complexity is masked and misunderstood" (p. 27), I missed opportunities to understand the stories more veteran colleagues were living. For Nora, Katherine, and for myself, teacher and administrator colleagues were pivotal characters in our stories, and our encounters with them were often confusing or negative experiences. While writing narratives of these encounters, I became aware that I knew little about the motivations or thought processes of these other characters in our stories, nor could I even imagine their perspective at times. As a result, I realized I was rendering little more than stock characters in my writing. While I did not want to vilify these characters, I did not know enough about their stories to portray them as the complex individuals I knew they must be. At the time, my focus was on the beginning teacher experience and this absence of understanding was a genuine part of that. Still, the questions were there.

**Teachers who stay.** If this had been the only moment where I was prompted to wonder about the stories of those who stay in teaching, perhaps my doctoral inquiry would have been much different. However, I was also reminded of something I had noticed in the literature on teacher attrition, something that seems, at times, to be taken for granted. It is often assumed in the literature that the same feelings that inform a teacher's decision to leave teaching, may also lead those who remain to cling to "practices and attitudes that help them survive but do not serve the education needs of students" (Feiman-Nemser, 2003, p. 25). The literature describes how some of those who stay are able to "develop as reflective professionals" while for others, "early coping mechanisms morph into their teaching practices, resulting, at best, in strongly disciplined, but pedagogically and relationally impoverished classrooms" (Anderson, 2009, p. 93). Just as the statistics I read about teacher attrition left me with more questions than answers about the individuals living those stories, I realized how much more there must be to the stories of those who stay than these simple statements might indicate.

I was also reminded of a story of a veteran colleague that had arisen during my conversations with Katherine and Nora. This teacher, who I will call Ms. Ellenor here, was one whom a beginning teacher would likely describe as stereotypically "burnt out." Ms. Ellenor was withdrawn from the rest of staff, not well-liked by students, and her pedagogical approach was both strict and conventional. However, the more we wondered about this teacher and others like her, the more details about her story were remembered. In a one-on-one conversation, Ms. Ellenor confessed that she had made plans to attend graduate school after a few years of teaching, but at the time, as a single women who owned a home, the bank would not maintain her mortgage if she left her job. It was a

choice between remaining financially independent, or taking a chance on further studies. Ms. Ellenor decided to stay.

When I think about this teacher, I wonder how she navigated the profession after that moment when she wanted to leave, but found leaving impossible. I wondered how similar her *story to stay by* was to my *story to leave by*, which Clandinin, Downey, and Huber (2009) define as "stories teachers begin to tell themselves when they can no longer live out their personal practical knowledge in their stories to live by and that then allow them to leave [or stay?] in teaching" (p. 146). Just as the purpose of my master's inquiry was to provide a space in which beginning teachers could explore their stories to leave by, the purpose of my doctoral inquiry was to provide a space in which stories to stay by could be as freely explored.

**My Experiences in Composing Stories to Stay By**

The beginning of my doctoral program and this research journey came with the chance to return to formal teaching, this time within the Bachelor of Education program at the university. Upon entering my doctoral program, I applied for both teaching and research positions, not knowing which to hope for, though I longed to teach. I had spent the two years of my master's program missing the relationships I had with students and the meaningful place those relationships held in my life. I imagined what it might be like to form similar relationships with people on their journeys into teaching. My imaginings filled me with anticipation. This excitement though, was coupled with an undeniable anxiety. I approached my first Teacher Education course with trepidation, with the restrained enthusiasm of one who has just been scalded by the first sip of a hot cup of tea. While waiting for the tea to cool, you feel the rough, swollen, spot behind your lip, a spot

that you know will heal if you can just refrain from burning it again, or from aggravating it with your tongue or teeth. I knew I needed to pace myself so that a return to teaching would not be quite so scalding, but if you love tea as much as I love teaching, this pacing requires discipline, and some thoughtful experimentation. I wondered about the space between scalding myself and drinking lukewarm tea. I knew that if I could not find a good position in that space, I may once again find myself leaving, which to me was an intolerable choice.

In order to pace myself appropriately, I looked back on some of the advice I have given to beginning teachers in workshop settings on taking small sips, on setting priorities, and on surviving in their chosen profession. I co-developed (and often co-presented) these strategies in collaboration with some equally eager, as well as kind and generous beginning teacher peers in a process that began over 9 years ago.[1] The strategies we developed grew out of the care with which we treated each other; the kind of care we wished every teacher would offer themselves and others. I felt it would be somewhat hypocritical *not* to try some of these strategies myself now that I had opportunity, so I turned to these exercises in order to formulate a plan.

**An exercise in finding your own good teacher.** Together, let's generate a list of the knowledge, skills, and attributes of a "good teacher." Now, from this list, decide which three items are the most essential to the teacher *you* have set yourself on the path to becoming. Next, identify the parts of your teaching practice essential to

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[1] This group is collectively know as the EBS, and consists of colleagues and friends Anders Alm, Owen Chan, Nathan Fawaz, as well as me.

developing those skills and ideals. These are the practices you will

prioritize in your "Teaching Life."[2]

I had by that time, written out my teaching philosophy many times, and had attempted to

live my philosophy in the high school classroom. I had also spent two years reflecting on

areas where, in order to conscientiously meet the demands of a chaotic collection of other

school related duties, I had sacrificed my teaching goals at the cost of my ideals. I was

determined to prioritize those things that made me feel successful in my teaching. This

included creating a learning environment where knowledge is constructed, an

environment that allows learners to connect course content to their knowledge and

experiences in ways that both affirm and disrupt prior assumptions. I also felt, and feel

successful when I establish my position as facilitator and guide – a *pedagogue:* one who

walks alongside students to a place of knowing.[3] In this position, the students know I am

also in a process of learning and inquiry, and that my voice is only one of many in the

room. In keeping with our own advice to new teachers then, the practices required to

work towards achieving *these* goals were set at the top of my priority list.

**An exercise in prioritizing time.** You have a limited amount of hours

in your day, your week, and in each month. Some of that time *must* be

assigned to self-sustaining tasks like eating, sleeping, exercising, and

maintaining the relationships and activities that make you, you.

Prioritize these in your "Teaching Life."

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[2] *The Teaching Life: An Impossible Game of Balance*[TM] is a board game based on the collective beginning experiences of EBS members, and is used in EBS workshops to prompt discussion and facilitate exercises like those described.

[3] Based on the etymology of the word pedagogy: "In ancient times, a family servant called a pedagogue lead the child (Gr. *paidagogos*, paidos=child+agein=to lead) to the teacher, to the place of teaching and learning. The pedagogue journeyed with the student." (Leggo, 2002).

In prioritizing time I was acting from a place of experienced and cautious enthusiasm. I was a new doctoral student, and knew that *my* teaching life had to include commitments like completing course work, commitments that also required and deserved my best efforts. Therefore I set limits on how much time I could spend on teaching in addition to classroom time. I did not set out a number of hours, but merely decided that this amount of time had to be "within reason" given my other commitments. I knew this would set some natural limits on the assignments I could design from scratch, and the assignments I could spend time marking; therefore selecting assignments had to be about quality over quantity. Of course, I also prioritized time spent on designing and preparing for those assignments and activities that would best help me achieve elements of my teaching philosophy.

> **An exercise in professional growth over time.** Remember that you
> are becoming the teacher you want to be, the teacher you feel your
> students deserve. Do the best you can with the skills and resources at
> your disposal, which include things like: a beginning teacher skill set,
> and things like the aforementioned, time. Together let's make a plan
> for developing as the teacher you are becoming over a 3-year time
> period.

I felt I had done much of this in the previous exercises. For me, this was really about the expectations I was setting out for myself as an experienced teacher in a completely new teaching setting, in a new town, in a new program, with new colleagues – the list of "new" went on. I felt I had to allow myself to be in the process of *becoming* proficient, and eventually masterful, in this course, at this level, in this context. This was not easy

for me as I take a great deal of pride in exceeding expectations, but my experience had taught me that just doing my best in a given context, with the skills and resources at my disposal, would still enable students to have a meaningful learning experience. In fact, I realized that not foreclosing on my own potential might also increase the meaningfulness of my own learning experience, which would in turn help me enact my goal of being an inquirer in the classroom. I became excited by these possibilities! I thought about how the second or third time I taught the course might be even better than the first. For example, after reflecting on the course assignments that I did not design from scratch, but borrowed from generous others, I could, on the second or third go, spend more time redesigning these or creating new assignments.

> **An exercise in professional self-care.**[4] Learn to recognize the
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> difference between C.o.Fs, F.L.Us, and burnout. Develop ways to
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> manage C.o.Fs and F.L.Us, which are an unavoidable part of teacher
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> growth, and learn to recognize the signs of burnout, which is always a
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> game-changer, if not a game-ender.

This exercise needs more exploration and explanation. The terms C.o.F and F.L.U were our (the EBS group's) new-teacher code words for emotional distress, which, unlike actual coughs or flus, we did not have language for since, as I mentioned earlier, the emotional work of teaching is so often absent in discussions about teaching. C.o.F stands for "Crisis of Faith:" faith in ourselves as young professionals, faith that someone did in fact know what they were doing when they allowed us to become teachers. C.o.Fs, we

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[4] At the time of creating these exercises, we did not use the phrasing "professional self-care." I use it here with reference to "the utilization of skills and strategies by workers to maintain their own personal, familial, emotional, and spiritual needs while attending to the needs and demands of their clients [or students]" (Newell & MacNeil, 2010, p. 62).

noticed, might be brought on by a failed or bumpy lesson, or may have no identifiable cause. In our workshops, our advice is to recognize these moments of self-doubt as signs that we are becoming the teachers we set out to be, that we are becoming reflexive enough to know when we have missed the mark – C.o.Fs are growing pains of professional growth. F.L.U, on the other hand, seemed an apt acronym for "Feelings of Lowered Understanding:" feelings that grow from encounters with the large and seemingly immutable bureaucratic structure that is the Education system. F.L.Us are caused by redundant paperwork or by obscure policies that seem aimed at deterring or ostracizing students or teachers, rather than welcoming them or encouraging their growth. Our advice for new teachers who experience F.L.Us when managing paperwork is to wade through the paperwork without agonizing over its contradictory complexities, or allowing it to take too much time away from those areas set as high priority. For those F.L.Us caused by perplexing policy or micropolitics (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002), our advice is to ask a trusted veteran teacher for help. We are careful to stress that both C.o.Fs and F.L.Us are a normal part of the teaching life, but they should not be an overwhelming part. If allowed to become chronic, these illnesses, combined with deficits in nutrition, sleep, and healthy relationships, can lead to burnout. Maslach (2006) defines burnout as "a psychological syndrome that involves a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job. The three key dimensions of this response are an overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment," (pp. 37-38). We are also careful to point out in conversations with beginning teachers that sometimes burnout leaves permanent marks.

To return to my tea-drinking metaphor, I knew it would not be enough, in my still slightly scalded state, to simply react to emotional distress. Yet, I did not really know how to go about being proactive; it was the most experimental part of my experiment. I decided to try to prevent chronic F.L.Us by being careful to avoid "big sips" of debates on policy or procedure. For someone who places a high priority on enacting values through practice, choosing in advance to accept an unknown status quo is more than a little troublesome. I decided that if policy or procedure began to impact my ability to create productive learning environments for my class or myself, then I would know it would be time to get involved. I decided also, in order to avoid too many C.o.Fs, to try to be realistic in terms of the amount of support and time I could offer students. For example, I decided to implement a 24-hour email rule, meaning I would wait 24 hours before responding to student email. This was not an easy decision either, however, I reminded myself I could always choose to respond more quickly to particular emails if a more immediate response was required. I suspected though, that if I established a "right away" response time to emails, then the increase in student email would limit my ability to reply, thereby causing guilt and worry that I was not meeting expectations. The resulting self-doubt was potentially overwhelming. It seems a small thing, but I had an experiential understanding of how quickly my store of energy can be depleted by combinations of seemingly small things. Even bigger than the part of me that was worried about all of these things – my ability to prioritize, to leave room for growth, to maintain my energy – was the part of me that was preparing my heart to welcome the new students I was about to encounter, and this part of me was annoyed by all these rules and longed to simply be excited, to simply be teaching.

**Implementing exercises.** As the semester began, my first task was to attend a meeting with the other course instructors and the course coordinator. I wondered if perhaps I had been a bit cynical in assuming there was a need to prepare myself for policy or procedure debates. However, the first challenge to my new intentions was in fact a policy debate. During that first meeting, we were asked to provide some feedback on the course outline all sections of the course shared. I expected those who had taught the course at least once before to offer their thoughts, but it was another new instructor who asked the first question. She asked about the weighting of the course assignments in relation to the weighting of the course midterm and final exams. She felt that because assignments are often more meaningful and are better at assessing a wider array of knowledge and skills, that it was the assignment that should carry more weight. As it was, the weighting of the two major exams was the heaviest. Though I sat quietly, moving only slightly to turn to the page in the course outline that discussed evaluation, inside me a conflict had already begun. I had, in preparing for this meeting, noticed the course weightings and had shared the concern of my new colleague. I wanted to share my thinking on the topic, but instead I bit my lip and tongued the metaphorical sore spot. I told myself that I needed to let this one, just this one, pass. For the remainder of what became a heated debate, I took notes for the future. I told myself that I would remember the pros and cons, observe how things in the classroom unfolded and then, perhaps, on the second or third go, I would make my own case. By then, I would know my more veteran colleagues better. I would know the department better. I would know more about the exams. Composing this story to stay by worked in the sense that I was able to refrain from jumping into the debate during that first meeting, though it was exceedingly

difficult to watch my new colleague develop F.L.U symptoms right before my eyes. I worried that the other teachers were getting the wrong idea about me; perhaps they thought I did not care one way or the other about assessment practices. This bothered me as well.

I spoke to a friend and high school teacher colleague not long after this and shared my conflicted experience. I communicated feelings of guilt, shame, a desire to help, feelings of helplessness, of not being able to make a difference, worry over being misunderstood, and worry about the consequences of sacrificing some ideals for others. However, I also shared a feeling that was tentatively growing; it was the most secret of all my feelings, and it was hope. I felt hopeful because I had been successful in honouring my boundaries: I had been successful in saving my energy for those things most important to me at that time, and I had allowed myself to be a beginner. As the semester went on I did begin to feel like the negotiations were worth it. My time in the classroom was rewarding, and it was a semester free from further metaphorical burns or other abrasions. I was working towards being the teacher I wanted to be, and enjoying teaching in the meantime. I remember doing a drama activity in the hallway (which earned me even stranger looks from passers-by than these hallway excursions had when I taught high school); I remember debates; I remember laughing. I was just teaching, and outside of the classroom, I was completing course work, and learning the ropes of my new program. The hope that had so tentatively presented itself began to grow.

I was excited then to bump into two other new instructors in the hallway one day. University hallways are a bit more subdued than high school ones, and bumping into colleagues was somewhat of a rare occurrence. I wanted to hear about their courses, how

they were finding things, and how those midterms went for them. My colleagues though, had other stories they wanted to tell. The hallway was suddenly full of stories about time. Teaching takes so much time, they seemed to boast; they barely had time for anything else. Their own course work was barely getting done in any adequate way; eating and sleeping were being sacrificed; and who has time for friends? Of course, the things taking up all their time were planning extravagant activities, marking weekly journaling, and the like. Where enthusiasm at getting to talk about my teaching had been just a moment before, more conflicted and foreboding feelings surfaced instead. I was still completing my other work and eating meals – perhaps I was doing it wrong after all. Can you be a "good" teacher without extravagant planning? Without the commitment to an abundance of marking? I was suddenly not so sure. I remembered that while I was growing up and imagining my teaching life, I believed that this amount of time, all your time, was a requirement of good teaching. However, I was beginning to believe that time away was a requirement to healthy, good, and sustainable teaching. I was experimenting in spaces in between these old and new beliefs. I was pulled away from these thoughts by the realization that the others were waiting for me to contribute to the conversation; my silence had become conspicuous.

"And how are you enjoying the students?" I asked in an attempt at a new topic.

"Of course they're wonderful, the students are so great," one of my colleagues readily responded.

"They are so full of enthusiasm," I replied, hoping to nurture this common ground, "and..."

"…nothing at all like having to deal with those high school students, right?" came the playfully sarcastic rejoinder.

I felt an internal sigh, a withdrawal back into my thoughts where I began to sort through all the stories I had just heard.

**The "Good" Teacher**

The disparaging comment about the stereotypical high school student was for me a reminder that whether in or out of educational settings, we all fall victim to the more "negative stereotypes of public schools, teachers, and students – images that tend to caricature rather than to enlighten" (Barone, 2003, pp. 202-203). Likely, my colleagues knew many wonderful high school students who were a joy to "deal with," but in conversations it seems easier to speak from within a dominant "meta-story designed to give final meaning to cultural [here, educational] phenomena" (p. 203). These stereotypes shape the image of the teacher we have in mind in idealized and unrealistic ways. My own indoctrination into this teaching mythos is evident in my silence and shame over having the "selfish" goal of learning how to be a sustained teacher, that is, how to compose a stories to live by in teaching that can be *sustained* in practice (Clandinin et al., 2009). The conversation about tireless planning feels like boasting because part of what we have been taught about "good" teachers, is that "the 'good' teacher is self-sacrificing" (Britzman, 1991, p. 28). The best "teachers 'really care' about their students and are willing to do right by them at great personal cost" (Dalton, 2004, p. 39). In the Hollywood films to which Dalton refers, teachers risk many different things. I once admired Mr. Holland in *Mr. Holland's Opus* (Herek, 1996) because he sacrificed his career as a composer and time with his family, inch by inch over a number of years, in

order to spend extra time with his students. I also admired Mr. Keating in *Dead Poet's Society* (Weir, 1989) for risking, and quickly losing his job as a by-product of inspiring his students, and in the process angering administration that is often stereotyped in these same films as aggressively antagonistic (Dalton, 2004). By the time *Freedom Writers* was released (LaGravenese, 2007), I had been teaching high school for over a year and my perspective had changed. I was actually somewhat terrified to watch Hilary Swank as Erin Gurwell work a second job to pay for classroom supplies; I grieved as she sacrificed her marriage because she had no time to spend with her husband; and I was utterly distraught, when, by the end of the film, she had left public school teaching because her incredible successes were not sustainable. Though I felt many powerful emotions while watching the film, I was for the most part simply confused: did I want to emulate this "good" teacher? If I did not, was I siding with the oppressive administration portrayed as her nemesis? Somewhere along the way, the ideas of risk and sacrifice have been conflated with the qualities of good teaching, and the cost of this conflation is high as "such images tend to subvert a critical discourse about the lived contradictions of teaching and the actual struggles of teachers and students" (Britzman, 1991, p. 29). In the hallway that day I was desperate to talk with empathetic others about the good moments I was having in the classroom, and my simultaneous feelings of not having earned them because of my determined resolve to remain sustained during the teaching process. In the hallway that day though, the conversation felt Hollywood approved; risk and sacrifice were being offered as "good" teacher credentials, and I felt myself lacking.

Not long after that day, I was reminded of another credential I was lacking: the one that tells us that good teachers "stay in their classroom" (Dalton, 2004, p. 40). While

this had been a constant issue for me during my master's program, I felt that internally at least, I had resolved this conflict. After all, I had completed an entire thesis exploring this myth, and I was actively teaching once again. At a gathering of my extended family however, despite my attempts to speak of anything but Education, my uncle, whose straightforwardness I usually find endearing, got right to the point:

"So, were you a *good* teacher?"

He was just making conversation at the time. I had not seen my extended family for a while, and when that happens you tend to only hear about each other in big events. By most standards, the big events in my recent life at that point were starting a teaching career, and leaving the classroom, (graduate school did not really seem to register).

"I *am* a good teacher," I replied, the emotion in my voice surprising me, "I am currently teaching in the Education program at the University." I became aware that other family members were listening intently to our exchange, and I became aware of my growing discomfort, my waning conviction.

"Well what I mean is," came the reply from my Uncle, so quickly I was almost interrupted, "did you like teaching?"

"Did I like teaching high school?" I was really clinging now. The very structure of my storied identity, the one where teaching at a university had given me rights to call myself a teacher, was on the verge of complete collapse. Never mind "good" teacher or "sustained" teacher, I was not even a teacher at all! "Yes, I did. I loved teaching high school. And I miss the students a great deal."

"Oh good! You see, it's normally the ones who don't like it who leave, and they don't like it because they aren't really any good at it."

I had no words of response, only a desperate desire to change the conversation, and the realization of the magnitude of that task.

**Ebb and Flow of Identity**

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) conceptualize identity narratively as "stories to live by," which explore the interconnectedness of identity with knowledge and context. I came to understand that my graduate school cover story, that is, what I claimed as my story to leave by, was an answer to the dominant narrative of education that covered over the more secret, complex, and ambiguous stories I lived (and continue to live) as a teacher. For me as well as for Katherine and Nora from my master's study, the space between dominant narratives and our lived stories was an area of tension, a place of interrupted stories, of interrupted identity, and accompanying confusing and overwhelming emotions. What was surprising to me, in my new teaching position, was how similar I felt, in terms of needing cover stories and being overwhelmed by silence. Where once I felt that simply teaching (in a formal setting anyways) was enough to ensure my "public identity as [a] caring and committed [teacher]" (Clandinin et al., 2009, pp. 146-147), I realized that I continued to need cover stories. This experience solidified the curiosity I had regarding the stories of those who stay in teaching. Despite my efforts to live out my identity as teacher, to negotiate a story to stay by, my uncle had unwritten much of the composing I had done in an instant, without even being aware that he had done so. I wondered if the storied identities of those who stay are sometimes as fragile?

Pinnegar (2005) writes of her own "negotiations with institutional constraints" (p. 260) to reveal how these negotiations influence her identity as a Teacher Educator. She defines the process of forming identity as one in which "we respond to the space

available by accepting, rejecting, or negotiating that role through the way we position ourselves in the space or shape the space to reflect our identity" (p. 260). Remembering the temporal nature of experience, we might imagine the ongoing nature of this positioning and shaping, and re-positioning and re-shaping, as we respond to spaces in which we find ourselves. Flores and Day (2006) describe identity in a similar way, as "an ongoing and dynamic process which entails the making sense and (re)interpretation of one's own values and experiences" (p. 220). Rodgers and Scott (2008), in their review of existing perspectives of identity within the research on teacher education and within developmental psychology literature, detail the four basic assumptions that different conceptions of identity share:

1. that identity is dependent upon and formed within multiple

   *contexts* which bring social, cultural, political, and historical

   forces to bear upon that formation;

2. that identity is formed in *relationship* with others and involves

   *emotions*;

3. that identity is *shifting*, *unstable*, and *multiple*; and,

4. that identity involves the construction and reconstruction of

   meaning through *stories* over time. (p. 733, emphases in original)

Reflected in this synthesis of identity conceptions is Dewey's ontology of experience, the narrative conception of identity as stories to live by, and the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space of the personal and social; of past, present, and future; and of place. Rodgers and Scott succinctly describe the self and identity narratively: "If our identities are stories, then our selves might be the storytellers" (p. 738).

**Approaching the Inquiry: Creating a Circle**

*To research is to create new knowledge,*

*to transform it into knowing, and then, you give it as a present.*

Dr. Shifra Schonmann shared this idea during a guest lecture she gave during my master's program, and it became a compass during the process of inquiry, reflection, and dissemination I explored with Nora and Katherine. While developing my plan for this inquiry, I had occasion to meet Dr. Schonmann again, and was again inspired to deeply reflect how to approach my doctoral inquiry in terms of methods, in terms of the ethical obligations I adhere to, and in terms of the purposes of this inquiry. To share this part of my approach to this inquiry, I share one final beginning.

I began to tell the stories of beginning teachers largely by chance. I made a classic beginning teacher mistake in saying, "Yes, I would love to present at that conference," to my department head in my first year of teaching. Days later that was followed by, "Yes, I would love to present on what it's like to be a beginning teacher," to the beginning teacher colleagues who had also agreed to present. I have a clear memory of how nervous the four of us were as people began to arrive at that first conference presentation. While preparing, often in each other's homes over wine, it seemed like a fantastic idea to frankly share our experiences with more veteran colleagues. Our motives were genuine and altruistic: we wanted other beginning teachers to have better experiences than we were having, and we felt we could provide teacher leaders with some insights, not only because of the stories we had to tell, but also because we had carefully considered *how* to tell our stories in an engaging and authentic way. We had transformed our knowledge into knowing. While standing in front of that first audience in our most professional

attire, we were so vulnerable we were figuratively naked. I am not sure what I would have done had I been presenting my stories alone, but I imagine I would have left out many of the things I had planned to say. Likely the image I painted in that moment would have been rose-coloured and optimistic, full of beginning teacher enthusiasm. That is, if I had ever even voiced my stories without the help of my peers; it was not until we began talking about our experiences that we realized that the challenges we were facing in our induction years were not the result of our own deficits, as we had each imagined before we shared our stories. I am thankful I was not presenting alone. I was presenting with three of my closest friends and colleagues. I was (re)presenting their experiences as well as my own. I felt that to honour their stories, I needed to tell them well, and I knew that my peers were treating my stories with the same care. Our lesson plan objective was to invite our audience, to participate in a "process of knowing" (Eisner, 2006, p. 9) our lives as beginning teachers, and we had carefully matched our lesson to its objectives. All that remained was the follow through.

After the moment of nervousness right before we began, the next thing I remember is how the session ended. It ended in a circle that included the four of us, and three or four experienced teachers who stayed to speak with us further. Others had come for the presentation, but these few remained behind. We were sitting in a circle by the window of the hotel conference room; the window revealed a spectacular view of the blue, grey, and green of the Rocky Mountains. The image of that circle by that window is as clear as a photograph in my mind's eye. It has been, and continues to be, a powerful reminder of the goals of my work. The experienced teachers wanted to know more about teaching from our perspectives, and they were willing to offer their perspectives in

response to what they heard. I remember the tears of relief that came when one of them genuinely answered a question I had been wrestling with for some time. I finally felt heard, and cared for. This tiny process of inquiry had a lasting impact on me. We had created new knowledge, carefully transformed it into knowing, and then offered it as a gift, and we received many gifts in return. It was a similar circle that the two days of dialogue with Nora and Katherine created, and I hoped to create another circle in my master's thesis writing, one that included the reader. It is a circle that I set out to create at the beginning of this doctoral inquiry, motivated by a deep wondering, and a deep and enduring compassion for teachers.

**Reading the Inquiry: Notes on this Dissertation Text**

This dissertation is presented here as a series of individual papers. During the analysis process, described in detail in Chapter 2, certain topics of discussion stood out to me as significant. Once I made the decision to highlight these topics, it was suggested to me that a paper-based format might appropriate. I was excited about this idea not only to best feature each topic, but also because it would provide an opportunity for me to receive mentorship on writing and publishing academic papers. The resulting papers are as follows:

Chapter 2 – **Collaborating with Research Friends: Ontology, Methodology, and Relational Ethics in a Group Narrative Inquiry**

Chapter 3 – **The Weight of a Heavy Hour: Beyond Teacher Workload** (submitted)

Chapter 4 – **Choosing Not to Break: The Daily Decisions of Teachers who Stay** (submitted)

Chapter 5 (concluding paper) – **Experiences of Residue: What Teaching Leaves Behind** (submitted)

Despite Chapters 2-5 being individual papers, I have chosen to present only a single list of references at the end of this document.

The two challenges in writing individual manuscripts within an overall dissertation were finding ways to write succinctly, and the necessity of repetition. While I made some changes to tailor the framing sections to each individual topic, there is repetition across the contextual and methodological aspects of the papers. Given that these papers have been submitted to different Education audiences, the repetition was necessary to set the stage for the insights shared in each individual manuscript, assuming that most readers will only be reading a single paper. I am aware that for committee members and readers of the dissertation, this repetition will be an experience in redundancy. This is especially noticeable in the concluding paper as not only is the frame for the inquiry repeated, but the previous two chapters are also briefly summarized.

**Chapter 2**

**Collaborating with Research Friends: Ontology, Methodology, and Relational**

**Ethics in a Group Narrative Inquiry**

This paper describes and reflects upon the details of the methodological approach taken in my doctoral inquiry project, *Stories to Stay By*. This narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) began with a wonder about how the experiences teachers have in their induction years continue to influence their teacher identities and practice. In order to explore this wonder, I engaged in a collaborative research process with a group of teachers who became "research friends." After sharing the ontological foundations of this research, I will offer a discussion of how being in a narrative inquiry in this group setting shaped every aspect of my methodological journey, from collecting field texts, to analysis, and finally to composing research texts. I share the details of the inquiry journey to highlight and inquire into moments of challenge or struggle, hoping that other narrative inquiriers might benefit from their sharing.

**Ontology: The Flow of Experience**

I am curious about how the experiences teachers have in their induction years *continue* to influence teacher identity and practice. I place emphasis on *continue* within this research puzzle to remind me of the nuances of meaning possible in this word and in this phrasing. I wonder what lasting influence induction experiences have, *and* I wonder about the temporal nature of experience itself.

Dewey (1934/2005) described experience as inherently continuous. Using the metaphor of a river Dewey described how the river's "flow gives a definiteness and interest to its successive portions. In an experience, flow is from one thing to another …

one part carries on what went before" (p. 38). Experiences become part of the context for later experiences, setting parameters for what is possible. Viewing experience as continuous is essential to understanding the experiences of teachers because leaving, or staying, or any other single event, is not "a thing happening at that moment, but [is] an expression of something happening over time" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 29). This implied to me that the stories of teachers who leave, and teachers who stay, might follow a similar path, save for the moment of decision – to stay or leave.

From a Deweyan perspective, experience is continuous, and happens in interaction, and in particular situations: "Life goes on in an environment; not merely *in* it but because of it, through interaction with it" (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 12, emphasis in original). Dewey's philosophy of experience is described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as a constant "conceptual, imaginative backdrop" (p. 2) to narrative inquiry, and Dewey's philosophy directly shapes the *three-dimensional inquiry space* that frames narrative inquiry work. The three-dimensional narrative inquiry space is shaped by: "the *personal* and *social* (interaction); past, present, and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation)" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Experience is storied, continuous, and is constructed through the "confluence of social influences on a person's inner life, social influences on their environment, and their unique personal history" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 41). In this confluence, the individual is active in meeting situations and in interaction. The individual is also active in reflection. Carr (1991), in describing the narrative quality of experience, notes "we are composing and constantly revising our autobiographies as we go along" (p. 76). Sometimes events shift in meaning only through "backward reference, whereby the unfolding phases of a series

receive their description and their significance from the end-point" (p. 78). As we actively meet, shape, and re-shape the confluence of experience, "we are at once spectators of, agents in, and tellers of [our] story" (p. 78).

Dewey (1934/2005) also characterized experience as having an inherently emotional quality. He described an emotive or aesthetic component as the very part of a *single* experience that separates it from larger *experience*. He was careful to point out that you cannot separate out the emotions from an experience, as emotions are not as "simple and compact as are the words by which we name them: joy, sorrow, hope, fear…" (p. 43). Rather, emotions are complex and evolving, they too need to be understood continuously. Experience is intrinsically emotion-full, as it is always "a matter of people in relation contextually and temporally" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 189). Literature considering teacher emotion tells us that emotion is an often-neglected aspect not only of teacher stories, but also of teaching practice (Hargreaves, 2000) and that the range and complexity of teacher emotion is too little understood (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). In addition, teacher emotion often occupies a "marginal role" in teacher education research (Uitto, Jokikokko, & Estola, 2015).

Dewey's pragmatism, or transactional ontology, has several implications for educational research. First, if experience always happens in interaction with the environment, then we must look to the environment or context as well as to the individual, in order to learn more about experience. Second, if experience is always transactional, then to be an objective "observer" of experience is an impossibility: "Narrative inquirers are always in an inquiry relationship… they cannot subtract themselves from relationship… nor can they pretend to be free of contextual influences

themselves." (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, pp. 69-70). Third, if our experience is continuous, then our histories are always with us, and cannot be separated from our scholarship or practice. Finally, if we understand experience as being defined by an emotional quality for it to be *an* experience, then our approach to inquiry must consider understanding emotion as key to understanding experience.

**Entering the Inquiry: Call for Collaborators and First Meetings**

I began by inviting current K-12 teachers with 7-10 years of teaching experience to join me in inquiry. I was not sure what originally inspired me to invite teachers with at least seven years of experience, but in reflection I realized that the start of that school year would have been my own seventh year of K-12 teaching had I not left to pursue graduate studies. It seems that running alongside my own plotline of leaving – of graduate school, of research with teachers, of teaching in new settings, and forging new stories to live by through these experiences – running alongside that plotline is the shadow of a different path, the one where I stayed in the public school classroom. This plotline is a shadow because it was never lived, but also because it is full of "what-ifs:" What if I had stayed in the same school? What if I continued to work with students who struggled with learning or behavioural challenges? What if I continued to be ill? What if I could not enact my pedagogical beliefs? After all, I had taken the years of my master's to reflect on my teaching experiences, and I had carefully negotiated a new relationship with teaching once I began teaching at the university. I am thankful that after a few semesters of teaching undergraduate courses I began to feel that I was becoming the teacher I set out to be. If I was, by my seventh year of high school teaching, the teacher I set out to be, how would I have arrived there? Besides this curiosity about the "what-ifs," I also hoped

that rich research conversations might be facilitated more easily with those similar to my own age, who experienced a similar Teacher Education program, and who had spent a similar amount of time in Education. As a model, I looked to Kennedy's (2001) dissertation work entitled *Race matters in the life/work of four, white, female teachers*. Kennedy sets out on a similar methodological path, and finds that working alongside those who are similar in age and experience "provided for personal connections between and amongst one another's stories" (p. 18). I already worried that because I left the K-12 classroom, I needed to take extra care in listening to the experiences of those who had stayed.

Part of me was also worried that teachers who stayed would be sceptical of me, not just as a teacher who had left teaching, but also as a researcher. This prompted me to think deeply about how I could better reflect the kind of relationships I was hoping to build in a researcher-participant relationship. For this reason, I approached the space between university ethics boards, which seem so rooted in a post-positivist paradigm, and the relational researcher I had in mind with caution, care, and curiosity. I wondered how or if the relational researcher I had in mind could navigate such a process?

One way I found to embody a relational ethic was the small change of the word "participants" to "collaborators." This language was intended to remind me that inquiry based on a transactional ontology is always "a *collaboration* between researcher and participants" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20), and to communicate to those who might come alongside me for this inquiry, that this was not a research approach where they would be positioned as *my* participants or as "subject … but instead [as] collaborators" (Finley, 2005, p. 682). The word *collaborate* comes from the Latin

*collaborare*: to labour together, and is defined as: to work together or to work with somebody else on a common project or with a common aim (New Penguin English Dictionary, 2000). It was my hope that they would feel comfortable calling me a collaborator as well, that this term implied a collaboration of equals, even while our respective roles differed. Though I was satisfied with the meaning behind this term, while speaking about my research as it unfolded, whether at Research Issues (a weekly research forum at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development at the University of Alberta), or with my family, while they watched me prepare meals for my research meetings, "collaborators" never felt right in conversation. What I eventually settled on, to avoid the scientific paradigm evoked by "participants," was "research friends." It was easy for my parents, friends, or university peers to ask about my "research friends:" not only was anonymity assured, but the kind of relationship I was working so hard to create was reflected back to me each time it was spoken. It was also a term by which we could more easily address each other, both to each other and to outsiders. When meeting by chance one day in public for example, Serena introduced me as her "research friend" and I could do the same.

To help build these relationships I also thought carefully about how to structure research meetings. Kennedy's (2001) approach to structuring the research conversations she had with the individuals in her study also informed my approach. Once she had gathered together a small group, they shared an evening meal and conversation together once a month for several months in a row. I was drawn to the prospect of being able to have conversation, and then time for reflection before meeting again, and Kennedy's structure provides that reflection time. This structure also leaves open possibilities for

exploring experiences over time, which is key to an inquiry framed by Dewey's ontology of experience. So I planned to invite my group of collaborators (later, research friends) to join me for a monthly evening of dinner and conversation over the course of a year.

**Call for collaborators.** I sent out the call for collaborators through my teaching networks. Since my time as a K-12 teacher, many of the colleagues I worked with or knew from professional activities have moved schools or districts, and some have become school leaders. It was not difficult for the word to spread. Within a week of sending the call I had several responses. I gave potential collaborators a copy of my research proposal and met with each individual in person so that we could both get a feel for what it might be like to engage with one another. I felt a great responsibility in these first meetings as I was selecting individuals who would work not only with me but also with each other, and until they agreed to join the inquiry, they would not have the opportunity to meet.

Each of the three teachers who became my research friends approached our inquiry together in a different way, from a different space. Two people who responded to my invitation I knew already, and though we had been mostly out of touch since I had been in graduate school, I was able to already consider them friends. Mara, teaching elementary school at the time, joined the inquiry in the midst of her own decision-making process regarding whether or not to take a year of leave the following school year. Carlos, a high school teacher, joined rather quickly, so quickly that I worried he had joined just because it was my project. As joining this inquiry was a long commitment, I wanted to be sure this was not just a "favour." Carlos, however, was eager to spend some guided reflection time on his teaching and his teaching journey, and his collaborative nature made the group aspect appealing. Serena, also a high school teacher, found out about the

study through a mutual friend and became the only group member who I had not met before. During my initial meeting with Serena, our conversation was full of thoughtful reflection on teaching, and I felt that Serena would add a valuable perspective to the group. Serena herself has been, from the beginning, very encouraging of this research project, and of the need for the experiences of teachers to be shared more widely. I should note here that the names Mara, Carlos, and Serena are the pseudonyms that each group member selected at the outset of the inquiry.

**First research conversation.** Our first meeting was in March, and it was a meeting that, from my perspective at least, left us all a little disrupted. In planning this first meeting, I sought to reinforce the openness of structure implied in the information I had included in the original call for collaborators. I wanted to be responsive to the questions, the knowledge, and the experiences of the group members that joined me:

> As we enter into narrative inquiry relationships, we begin the ongoing negotiations that are part of engaging in a narrative inquiry. We negotiate relationships, research purposes, transitions, as well as how we are going to be useful in those relationships. These negotiations occur moment by moment, within each encounter, sometimes in ways that we are not awake to. The negotiations also occur in intentional, wide awake ways as we work with our participants throughout the inquiry. (Clandinin, 2006, p. 47)

With this in mind, I approached our first meeting ready to surrender to the conversation that would emerge, rather than attempt to direct discussion towards something pre-determined. I decided to bring something to occupy our hands in case of silence, something that could feed conversation if the conversation needed feeding, or could be

just something that broke the ice while keeping our hands busy. I wanted also for that first meeting to be "low-key." Instead of making one of my more elaborate recipes (not that I have very many of those), I made a very simple meal of my favourite bagged salad (pear and gorgonzola) and my favourite seasoned chicken breasts. I wanted the meals, and the conversations, to nourish, to be healthy and generative, rather than heavy and difficult to digest. The meals were also one way in which I hoped to be "useful" to these teachers. With that first meal though, I was also being careful not to set expectations too high.

Regardless of my planning, or thinking, or intentions, I was nervous and full of worry. I worried that my Dad's house, where we were holding that first meeting, would be too far, or people would get lost on the way. I worried that I was taking too much time out of everyone's Sunday, knowing that teachers often spend Sunday evenings planning and worrying about the week ahead. I worried that we would not "click" as a group and that this whole process would be a burden, rather than a gift.

Mara arrived first, about half an hour early as she too was worried about being lost. "The directions were great!" she said as she handed me the cake she had brought for dessert so she could take off her coat and shoes. "This is a nice place, how long have your parents lived here?"

We chatted easily and steadily as we made some tea and waited for the others to arrive. Carlos arrived next, also without getting lost.

"I just let Google maps direct me, it seemed to do okay," he said. I was starting to feel more at ease, and when Serena arrived, my worries faded and I gave into my intention to surrender the space to them for the duration. We had tea and dinner and

chatted about everyone's current teaching assignment. The group was diverse in the sense that each of them worked in a different school district and had a different teaching assignment.

Our conversation quickly centred on teaching and though I had planned on turning on the recorder after dinner, I found myself questioning that decision almost immediately. I decided to keep to the original plan, though, I was enjoying the relaxed atmosphere and did not want to cause a shift by beginning the recording. Serena was taking care of tea, and Mara and Carlos grabbed themselves extra water as needed while we talked. That initial discussion touched lightly on many topics, from Mara's considered leave, to Carlos's brother's experience living in Ireland, to Serena's experience of teaching in the United Kingdom, to the ways in which Google can help us answer existential questions. Throughout I remained relatively quiet, at times I wanted to jump in but I remembered my intention to let the discussion guide itself. More than this though, I found there remained an image of the "objective" social scientist in me, a part of me that was trying to stay removed.

It was not until about an hour into our first discussion, after dinner, and dessert, and more tea, that I tentatively introduced the activity I had prepared for the evening. I asked Serena, Mara, and Carlos to collage a collection of words and/or images that represented their current teaching practices, and I engaged in the activity myself. The sounds of ripping and tearing filled the room as Mara, Carlos, and Serena began to elaborate on how they felt about their respective teaching practices. Mara began by explaining her feelings of lost idealism.

"It's just, with all the recent cutbacks our school lost half of our aides," she explained, "and I had some really difficult students added to my class. And I feel like, it's just so hard to watch them slip through the cracks. I know I have the skills to help them, but I don't have the time to help them. According to my beginning teacher self, that's just not something I was ever going to let happen. I was so idealistic then. I don't feel idealistic anymore. I guess you lose that along the way."

"I don't feel as though I've lost my idealism," Carlos offered. "It's changed, certainly. I mean, it's more based in reality now, but I still think, on a week-to-week basis, how am I going to change my students' lives? How can I move them forward? Those sorts of big questions are still at the core of what I think about why I'm doing what I'm doing."

Serena offered a middle perspective, filling in this space between Carlos and Mara. "Of course I was highly idealistic in my Teacher Education program. I think that's so common for Humanities teachers. We know the ways in which literature has changed our lives for example, and we want to pass this on. I feel I haven't lost my idealism completely, but I definitely feel more ground down," Serena reflected. "This is my 9th year of teaching and it feels like a really long time. Along the way I kept thinking things were going to get better. But I do wonder sometimes what I'm giving up in the other parts of my life, and for how much longer I can continue to give those things up. I wonder about teaching for the long term."

"I've literally never felt that," Carlos responds, somewhat surprised. "I think more about what I would be giving up in order to take a year leave or do something else. I

mean I love my job." There was a long pause, broken by Carlos's wonder: "Am I an anomaly?"

It was a powerful question, and an interesting tension to explore and consider.

**Second research conversation.** In the weeks before our second meeting, I spent time in reflection, and in worry and wonder. I worried that while we were able to unearth a few big tensions, that our conversation had remained too shallow to explore those tensions in meaningful and productive ways. I worried that I had not directed the conversation enough, I felt I should be "getting at something" – something important! How could I call it research if all we were doing was sitting around chatting? As I write this now, at the end of my inquiry, I realize that most of my worries were unfounded, but I will not go so far as to say they were unnecessary. The worries drove me to carefully construct and reconstruct the parameters of each meeting, and that constant feedback loop of reflection and action became a meaningful part of this relational research.

For the second meeting, I was inspired to offer a prompt for our discussion. Motivated to "get at something," I decided to offer a question directly related to my inquiry about the ways in which beginning experiences continue. In the week leading up to our research dinner, I asked Carlos, Serena, and Mara to reflect on a moment from their beginning years when they felt successful. I was motivated to find the common ground we almost uncovered in our first meeting, and to give everyone a chance to share a moment of joy in teaching so that we would have that as a foundation. I also hoped this would help us to get a bit deeper into the discussion.

I asked everyone to recount their stories of success rather early in our research conversation this time. We also had a set end time for the evening so that everyone could

plan the rest of their Sunday evening; this end time became fixed for the rest of our meetings. The stories Carlos and Serena shared, and the story I shared after Carlos invited me to, resembled one another and might even be called "typical" or at least expected success stories of teaching. Each told the story of a moment of connection with students, a moment when a structure or activity we offered as teachers was taken up by students with great enthusiasm, where there was an exchange of energy and relationship that felt overwhelmingly positive. Mara's story did not fit this "typical" plotline and told instead of a very challenging first year experience, but one that was very well supported by her then administrator.

In reflection on that meeting, what struck me in all of these stories was the passionate quality of voice with which they were told. That meeting, each of us, myself included, were able to share a moment of our passion as teachers. This I think was an important foundation for our later discussions as it became more and more evident as our inquiry progressed that we had nothing to "prove" to each other as teachers. At the time, I did feel that we were "getting at something" important, but that did not mean I knew what to do next.

**Within the Inquiry: Conversations and Interim Analysis**

My long drives down the highway to and from our research meetings became moments of reflection for me. During my drive to our third research meeting, this thoughtful stillness was set to music as I listened to Alt-J (2012) perform "Interlude 1." The thought of interludes reminded me of my negotiations with teaching both in the K-12 classroom and later at the university, of the choices I had made based on my deep wish to stay afloat, and to become the teacher I set out to be. I was thinking also about my

uncertain future, knowing that my doctoral program was closer to the end than the beginning, and that I had choices to make about the journey ahead. I thought about my research friends, and how their school year was coming to end, and they were looking ahead to the next. For Mara, this would mean making a choice regarding a personal leave. Serena too had a journey ahead as her partner had applied for a job abroad, which would take her on a new adventure. I thought about Carlos, and his worry that the school would not have enough Drama students for two Drama teachers in the fall. I drove and felt the warm sun on my skin and I suddenly had a strong sense of what had been missing from our first two meetings… me! I reflected on how I participated in the collage making, but did not share my collage or thoughts about it. I remembered how it was only after being asked that I had shared my story of success from my beginning years as a teacher. I realized I was holding back, I was staying distant, rather than being fully present and engaged. This realization surprised me because I *knew*, theoretically at least, I could not pretend that I was not there, that I was part of the relationship in this relational research. Though in every formal way I had acknowledged and claimed to embrace the transactional ontology described earlier, I also knew, in that moment, there was a part of me that held fast to the image of the "objective" researcher. I let that image fade, and as it did I felt excited to be truly present with Serena, Carlos, and Mara that evening, and to embrace, rather than shy away from, the richness of our interactions.

It was a very interesting meeting, and really, it was the beginning of a very rich phase in the inquiry. It was a moment of interlude, not only for each teacher individually as they transitioned from one school year to the next, but also in the larger education

context as the Alberta government had recently announced rather sweeping cuts to education at all levels.

Early in our discussion that evening when Serena asked me "how is this playing out for you at the university level?" I was ready to engage in a much more authentic way than I had in the past. Where during our first meetings I think I would have limited my answer to more impersonal thoughts on the state of academia, that evening I included my outlook as a whole person considering entering academia. Likely, the shift in that third meeting was caused by a combination of my presence as a whole person, and the fact that we were becoming comfortable with each other, but there was a definite shift. At the outset of the inquiry I had invited my research friends to send me any thoughts they had on our meetings as our research progressed, and after our third meeting Serena sent a note of reflection that included her feeling that it was "our best one yet!" I agreed.

From this third meeting forward the flow and pattern of our meetings was established. We met from our third meeting on at Carlos's house. He had offered to host the meetings so that my parents did not have to vacate their house once a month, and so that we could all spend a bit less time driving. I brought our meal for the evening, which sometimes required some time in the oven when I arrived, but otherwise Carlos did the hosting, which meant I could focus almost exclusively on listening to the stories that were shared. I found real pleasure in allowing the meals we shared to become more elaborate and as nourishing as I could make them. I watched as friendships grew between all of us, and research friendships became Facebook friendships as well.

**Field Texts.** I continued to record each meeting on my digital audio recorder, routinely switching it on as soon as I arrived as we had become used to its presence.

These audio recordings were the most significant of the field texts I collected, and were six in total as we met during March, April, May, and June of one school year, and in October and November of the next. Additional field texts included individual and group email exchanges, which at times involved reflection on our conversation, or links to teacher stories in the news. I also collected our early collages, and later the annals (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) we created during our last meeting together.

**Interim analysis in conversation.** In this group narrative inquiry setting, analysis began in conversation. Two topics, "heavy hours" and "choosing not to break," that developed into individual papers were highlighted as significant during conversations. The topic of a third paper grew out of these two topics, and these three papers each become chapters in my paper-based dissertation. During our discussions, the back and forth, the laying of individual experiences alongside those of others, was a process of analysis. At times, we really sought to unpack one thing or another. During that third meeting for example, the term heavy hours was coined and developed into a defining and misunderstood feature of the teaching life. We were in "dialogue" (Freire, 2000), and through dialogue we came to know and understand more about our experiences. Sometimes a topic or line of inquiry was marked as important by a firm statement from one of us indicating significance, and sometimes there was just a certain energy to our discussion, a generative feeling in the room, heightened interest from everyone, questioning, circling, laughing… I was drawn to these moments of generativity as I listened to our conversations in-between meetings.

**Interim analysis in listenings.** The in-between meeting space was a second space of interim analysis. My rhythm of reflection and planning for each meeting continued,

which meant that sometimes I shared a prompt or topic in advance, and sometimes I simply showed up ready to let the evening unfold. Sometimes I kept questions at the back of my mind in case certain topics arose again. For example, one of our early conversations about choosing not to break stood out to me both because of the energy it created in discussion and because I had written about a similar topic in my narrative beginnings. When the conversation circled around again, I wondered aloud about the things I had thought about while listening to our conversations between meetings. At the time, I did not realize how significant those long drives were to be, but looking back, I see that they were a significant space in this inquiry.

As I listened to the audio recordings of our conversations, both between research dinners and after they were concluded, I was drawn to several things. As explained, I was drawn to those generative moments of dialogue, but I also found myself, as a writer and as a student and teacher of English literature, drawn to strong imagery, symbols, and metaphors during our discussions. The lingering sensation of a pulled tooth, for example, was one thing I came to find symbolic, though Carlos did not intend it as such at the time. This pulled tooth conversation made its way into these pages, perhaps because as I listened, I heard there was more to this story. Carlos was not only recounting his experience of having a tooth pulled, but I could hear clearly on the audio that he was pacing, finding tablecloths, making coffee, opening and closing cupboards and doors, talking quite quickly (even for him). And while I must have read these cues at the time, because on the audio recording I heard myself check in with him about how he was feeling, in the re-listening these cues reminded me again that there was something important to attend here. In the re-listening, I was no longer attending to the dynamic of

the group, keeping my eye on the time to not burn dinner, wondering if everyone had everything they needed, worried that once again I was taking too much time away from their Sunday evening planning time, etc. Without all of these worries dividing my attention, I noticed all of these other cues telling me that Carlos was feeling unsettled. Another strong set of imagery that did not make its way into these pages was a rather lengthy discussion we had about crows and ravens, their ability to use tools, and their genetic memory. I played with this as a metaphor for a time, but found it was not a strong link to any other parts of our conversations, or useful as an analogy for pedagogical purposes during analysis or writing.

After an interim listening, I shared a small piece of writing with the group. It was focussed on Mara's experiences of hatching butterflies in her classroom. I was drawn to the story, rich in imagery and in symbolism, and the experience itself resonated with me. Later on, Carlos and I had a discussion in which he commented that it was a nice vignette, but he could not really connect to it meaningfully. I wondered about this for a long time, and perhaps it was this conversation that sent me searching for those threads that linked all three experiences. This is not to say that I omitted the unique, in fact, in each research text that grew out of the inquiry I endeavoured to offer the perspective or experience of each research friend and to highlight the ways in which heavy hours, choices made not to break, or residue (the main topic of the third paper) was different but present for each of them.

Something else that stood out to me as I listened were the individual journeys each of my research friends was on. Before firmly committing to research texts centred on topics, research texts based on individual stories was, in my mind, the alternative. In

the end though, I felt strongly that the knowledge we created and shared, those topics that seemed to link individual experiences in some way, needed to be at the forefront; that this was the strength of being together in conversation.

**Interim analysis in indexing.** My search for a useful way to organize the audio conversations was another space for analysis. Our conversations, held Sunday evenings over dinner, were often about the weather, or about television shows, or in the beginning, were full of the kind of conversations people share as they get to know each other. I knew I did not need to have all of this word-for-word, but I did want to be reminded of all of our topics of conversation later on. Sometimes the weather or what we did that weekend helped set the "place" for our experiences; for example, in May, part of the context for our conversation was the gorgeous day. There was something lighter about that warm, sunny weather, and about the end of the school year. I also wanted to maintain the kind of listening I had been doing in my car, or while puttering around the house, between meetings. While listening, I was present, I was in the conversation, I was thinking and reflecting. I wanted to find a way to maintain this presence and to guide myself back to whole pieces of conversation later. I remembered a method of indexing large amounts of data I learned in a methodology course in my master's program (Loutzenheiser, personal communication). I adapted this approach to my practice of listening on the go and worked with two things I always had with me: my pack of coloured pens, and my notebook with perforated pages that could be torn out and used as index cards.

As I listened to each conversation again, I made notes about what was being said, while periodically writing down a time stamp. I labelled each card with the month of the conversation, the length of the audio recording (as this was how my audio-recorder

labelled the conversations), and a card number so that I could work with them out of

sequence later on. The notes were colour-coded, one colour for each person including me.

In order to preserve anonymity should the worst happen and the cards be misplaced, I

used pseudonyms or initials for both names and places.
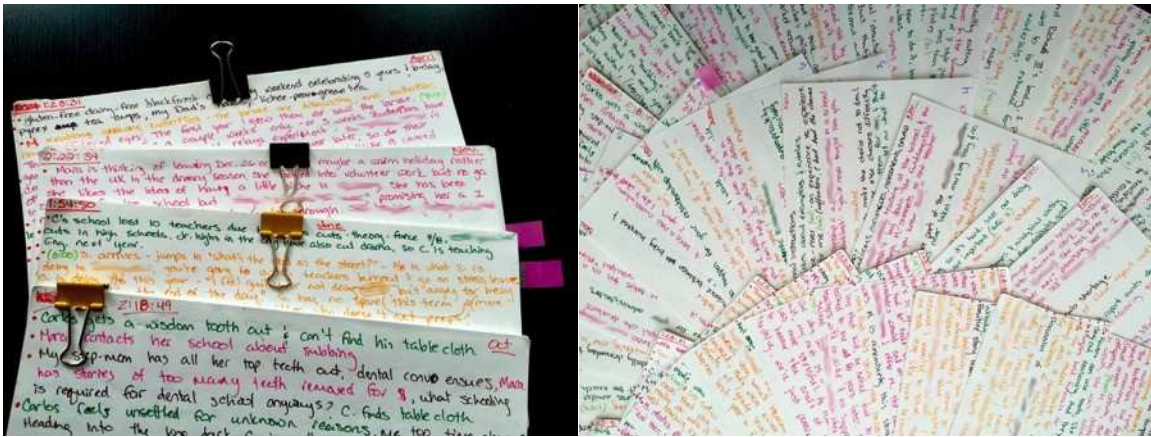


*Figure 2.* Index cards ready for transport (left) and for work (right)

This way of indexing allowed me to do many things. I could jot down little

"MOTs" (an abbreviation I began to use long ago standing for My Own Thought, as

opposed to what was being said at the time). I could almost keep up with the flow of

conversation as I created the indexes, pausing only occasionally to keep up with

particularly dense bits. And I was creating a visual artifact I could work with in a number

of ways. I could, for example, read through the orange bits to be reminded of Serena's

story as it unfolded over the time of our inquiry or read for brown bits for those MOTs I

had left for myself. I could also select cards that spoke to heavy hours (for example) and

lay them all out in front of me as I wrote. I carried these cards along with me at all times,

held together by little bulldog clips and kept tucked within the safety of my notebook. I

pulled them out to read through them often; it was nice to have them on hand when I had

a fleeting thought. As I began to build research texts, I began to pull threads together

from the index, and would then return to the audio (guided by the bright green time stamps), do a targeted re-listen, and transcribe the pieces I was calling forth.

**Interim analysis in literature searches.** As I pulled imagery and conversation pieces that spoke to themes of heavy hours, choosing not to break, and residue, I also began to explore these themes within the literature. This search for articles that might reflect aspects of our conversations was an additional space for analysis. I wondered how those experiences shared and explored by our group of research friends would be situated in the literature. I wondered if other educators in other contexts were articulating their experiences in similar ways. I hoped to strengthen the presentation of our conversations by placing them alongside other discussions that might speak to them or frame them in some way.

## Sharing the Inquiry: Moving to Research Texts

The next layer of analysis was in weaving together the resonant literature I had found, the pieces of conversations I had selected from our dinners, along with the ontological and methodological framing sections for each paper. I had many goals while writing: to present what we had shared well; to honour those wishes expressed by my research friends that some of our understandings make their way into conversations beyond our own; to situate those understandings in existing literature; to invite the reader in, to invite them into a dialogue that was open enough for them to find a link to their own experiences; to create an experience for the reader, one in which they could come to know the pedagogical space this narrative inquiry created (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013). I took Friere's words to heart that writers have a duty to write well, "no matter if they are scientists or philosophers … to make understanding easier" (Horton &

Freire, 1990, p. 32). Writing well is, for me, one way in which I can make the reader's experience more "educative," in the Deweyan (1938/1997) sense of opening up future possibilities.

In attempting to create an educative experience that would enable an understanding of the experiences shared by my research friends and highlighted in these manuscripts, I had other educators in mind as the key audience. However, because this was also a dissertation, I also had my committee members in mind and was always mindful of university standards. As this was a paper-based dissertation, I also had individual journals and potential reviewers in mind. Most importantly, I was always writing with my research friends in mind – even if "there is no such thing as 'getting it right'" (Richardson, 1997, p. 91), I hoped the contours of what I was composing would feel familiar to them. I held fast to the tenet of narrative inquiry that tells us "we owe our care first to research participants" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 205), not only in the writing, but throughout the inquiry process.

The final stages of the writing process were also a vital space for analysis; this "composition of final research text [was] itself a kind of further inquiry" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 206). As I explored the concept of heavy hours for example, I wrote in verse, I drew mind maps, I experimented in ways of explaining heavy hours until I found my way in to the research text. During the process, I was open to including these other forms of writing within the academic papers, but in the end, I found they were just a step in the writing inquiry, one that deepened my understandings and shaped the direction for the final papers.

Once I had a clear direction, a deep sense of the paper, I worked with the pieces of conversations I was calling forth from the indexes, through transcribing, and began to draft the conversations as they would appear in each paper. While writing these, I kept to the verbatim dialogue as much as possible, especially in attempting to capture each person's speaking rhythm and style. However, as I was composing conversations for readers not present during our conversations, readers who did not have the benefit of all the getting-to-know-each-other conversations we shared, I edited the verbatim text to make understanding them easier, to make them flow together in written form. I reworked "inside jokes" or sarcasm used within our discussions as shorthand, but that someone outside our conversations might not understand. I omitted the "ummms" and "likes" (for example) common in conversation, and at times I added a rejoinder clause to link together pieces of conversation from different meetings, but about the same topic. There were a few details I changed or omitted to ensure anonymity for each research friend, or to blur the identifying details of anyone outside the inquiry of whom we spoke. When I shared the manuscript drafts with my research friends, I explained my choices in this way: "The goal is for the final papers to reflect your experience in a way that feels true for you, to invite the readers into these kinds of deeper discussions about teaching, and to share the experiences and understandings we came to during the inquiry in a way that is clear. Those goals are much more important than choices of single words or phrases which, while they are verbatim for the most part, have been edited with those other goals in mind." I encouraged each research friend to remind me of anything key I had missed, to change any details they felt were inaccurate, or to expand on anything they wanted explained more clearly. Serena, Carlos, and Mara each provided some feedback along the

way. The changes they suggested during this process, without exception, strengthened the final research texts.

I also had the benefit of my "relational response community" (Clandinin, 2013) along the way. I would, at times, share short pieces of writing to this community of narrative researcher colleagues and friends, or just call one up to talk things over. This community was invaluable during the recursive analysis and writing process.

Despite this support, a discussion of my writing process would be incomplete without some mention of struggle. This stage brought unexpected challenges for me as a writer. I have always found my way to a joyful place in writing, but this writing journey was an exception. In reviewing what I have written above, about the goals and audiences I had in mind as I wrote, I must acknowledge that I was putting a great deal of pressure on myself, or perhaps the writing space of narrative inquiry was one that was simply new and challenging. As Clandinin (2013) affirms:

> Holding these conceptual commitments of narrative inquiry mean that
> the kinds of interim and final research texts we create are difficult
> ones in at least two ways. They are difficult in the sense of composing
> texts that continue to honour these commitments, but they are also
> difficult because they challenge us to attend in multiple directions and
> toward multiple audiences. (p. 205)

Only when I let go of many of these goals, especially those that strove for "good" writing, did the words come. In the end, I hope some of my goals are accomplished; I hope I have found an effective way to share the experiences of my research friends for the benefit of others.

**Reflection on the Inquiry: Working in a Group Dynamic**

The group dynamic was something that continued to be at the forefront of my mind throughout the inquiry: from the time when I was meeting individual teachers who would become research friends, not just to me, but also to each other; through our group conversations and meals; and later in analysis and writing as I tried to find those things that connected our experiences. As I reflect on this inquiry process, and on the relational ethic that is central in narrative inquiry relationships (Clandinin, 2013), I am becoming more aware that this was a relationship I sought to support in addition to my individual relationships with each research friend. When asking myself questions around what I might do differently next time, I find myself wondering if there might have been ways for me to nurture both the group dynamic and my individual relationships in richer ways. At the same time, I see great value in our group conversations, both in the sense of offering mutual support, and in the sense of generating rich conversations.

**The Significance of Stories to Stay by**

For me, there are several ways in which I hope this relational inquiry might be useful to others. As this inquiry began, I held fast to the sentiments of my close colleague who, in a published narrative of leaving teaching early (Fawaz, 2009), outlined the following reasons (among others) why sharing the narratives of teachers is important for beginning teachers:

- … I needed information and training, both during my teacher

  preparation program and continuing into early professional

  development around the issues of teacher attrition, and the signs and

symptoms of stress and burnout, so that I would have been able to

recognize what was happening to me … (para. 53)

• I need teacher narratives that do not represent teachers as either

heroes or villains. Good teacher. Bad teacher. Show me good

teachers with all their human fallibility in place. I know I'm no hero,

but I spent an unnecessary amount of time worrying that if I didn't

do this or that unrealistic thing I wouldn't have a hope of becoming a

good teacher, or worse, that I would become a bad teacher. (para.

54)

• I needed administrators and veteran colleagues who could have

identified that I was struggling and worked with me to find

solutions. (para. 58)

• I need to know that there are people who are actively and

effectively working to affect real change for teachers—if students

really are to be at the centre of everything I do as a teacher, which I

think is a good thing, then I need to be at the centre of someone

else's focus. (para. 59)

I find now, at the end of exploring stories to stay by, that these reasons are no less

significant as a teacher's career continues. Teachers, beginning in teacher preparation and

continuing throughout their careers, need detailed information about teacher experiences

of stress and distress. The worry about becoming a "bad" teacher can make it difficult for

some teachers to move beyond cover stories and share the ways in which teaching is

challenging. I hope that sharing the stories around heavy hours, around the experiences of

living out and living with choices made not to break, and about the "residue" that teaching leaves behind, will offer individual teachers, and groups of teachers in teacher education or professional development settings a way to talk about teacher challenges. I hope these stories will offer a way to discuss good teachers as whole people working in relation to students, families, and colleagues. I hope that individual teachers might gain insight into their own experiences, and perhaps even feel supported.

In sharing these experiences I also aim to encourage educators, at all levels, to gain in understanding of and empathy for their colleagues. Reading the stories of others "provokes a dialogue of comparison and recognition, a process of memory and articulation that makes one's own experience available as a lens of empathy" (Bateson, 1989, p. 5). As Fawaz (2009) outlined, in those beginning years, it is important for others to be able to recognize a struggling colleague and to be able to offer some guidance or assistance. Any empathy encouraged among teachers, at all levels, may go a long way towards beginning dialogue, or increasing generosity amongst colleagues. This is why I have chosen as audiences for my papers a general education journal, a journal focussed on teacher education, and a journal for leaders in education.

At this interpersonal level, much can be done to *sustain* educators (Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009), and it is at this relational level that I hope this work will be of most use. Ballet, Kelchtermans, and Loughran (2006) describe how educators must "cope with a turbulent policy environment" (p. 215). This includes constantly changing provincial budgets, changing governments, and shifting government priorities. Public education will always be caught up in this turbulence, which means, in part, "that teachers are not in full control of the conditions they have to work in" (Kelchtermans,

2013, p. 391). This places teachers in vulnerable positions, a vulnerability that Kelchtermans argues is "a structural [and permanent] characteristic of the profession" (p. 391). While continual advocacy for funding and policy improvement will always be vital for a publicly funded education system, the relational is not to be overlooked as a significant source of change:

> …it is in collaboratively transforming the narratives within which
>
> people live that narrative inquiry seeks to lay the foundations for social
>
> change. Without such foundations rooted in the storied experiences of
>
> ordinary people … efforts at social change are condemned to either be
>
> ineffective or hollow exercises of externally imposed authority.
>
> (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 50)

Policies may be created with the best of intentions, but without people to pick them up with the right spirit or understanding, much of those intentions can be lost in their implementation. In both positive and negative ways, "local working conditions buffer, modify, and mediate the policy demands and thus their impact on teachers' actions and job experiences" (Kelchtermans, 2005, p. 1004). In order for individuals to work at improving their local conditions, they must first be awake to the experiences of others.

In conversation with a committee member during the writing process, I shared this earlier success story that I offer now to ground this discussion. One of my former teacher colleagues had occasion to participate in one of the workshop presentations I offered on my master's inquiry into beginning teacher attrition. A few years later I met her again at a summer folk festival. She had by that time become a principal, and found herself working with beginning teachers. While we chatted that summer, she told me how, as she watched

those teachers beginning struggle to find their way, she remembered my work, and decided to intervene. She made adjustments to their course load, and offered them extra support with students where needed. As she spoke, I could imagine how much her actions had changed the micropolitical landscape for these teachers. Where an administrator who was not as awake to the challenges beginning teachers face may have largely ignored them, instead, they had an advocate and guide. I was also reminded of the many stories I heard from beginning teachers from across the province as a research assistant on 5-year longitudinal study (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2013). Many of these teachers told us that, despite the new policy focus on teacher induction in Alberta, it sometimes took an administrator's direct intervention to change school norms and practices. Likely, my colleague's intervention had implications not just for those teachers she reached out to, but for the school climate as whole. I could not have really asked for a better kind of feedback for my work with and for beginning teachers, and it is this same kind of change, at the micropolitical level, that I hope this dissertation will effect.

> There is no certainty in what will happen next, only that it will be in dialogue, in wondering, in openness to stepping into liminal spaces – spaces of ambiguity and uncertainty – with teachers, children, youth and families that we can continue to compose educative lives. (Clandinin et al., 2009, p. 153)

## Chapter 3

## The Weight of a Heavy Hour: Beyond Teacher Workload

**Introduction: One More Class is a Huge Change**

It is June, a month which brings the promise of summer, the end of the school year, and during this particular year, some very large provincial budget cuts to education funding in Alberta. I am sitting in Carlos's[5] living room, so far the first to arrive for the third research dinner Mara, Carlos, Serena, and I will share.

"We're losing 10 teachers from our school" Carlos is relaying anxiously, "and our enrolment for next year is going to be about the same. All high schools in the district are experiencing similar losses, that's where the cuts are being put."

Serena arrives and jumps into the conversation as she removes her coat. "So how are they making up the difference?" she asks.

"Most of our teachers are moving to 7-out-of-8," Carlos replies.

"That's a mistake," Serena says gravely, "a huge mistake." Carlos and Serena, while in different school districts, both teach in high schools using a 2-semester system. "7-out-of-8" refers to a schedule which provides teachers with a preparation period during only one of the two semesters, rather than a preparation period in both semesters (6-out-of-8). "Our district went to 7-out-of-8 a couple of years ago," Serena continues, "and the increased stress levels in the building, the increase in the number of leaves, well it's been such a huge change. And actually, it's why I'm considering leaving teaching now."

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[5] "Carlos," "Mara," and "Serena" are the self-selected pseudonyms of the three teachers who participated in this inquiry, which is described in greater detail below.

**Purpose: Foregrounding the Heavy Hour**

That she was considering leaving as the result of her district's shift to 7-out-of-8 is a statement Serena made more than once as our monthly conversations continued. This prompted us to collectively explore why adding one more class to a teacher's day is a change with such a huge impact. During this exploration we coined and then began to conceptualize the term "heavy hour" as one way to explain the significance of this shift. As we talked about why we would describe teaching hours as "heavy hours," we also discussed the ways in which these hours are becoming even heavier for Serena, Carlos, and Mara, and the impact this weight has for their lives. The purpose of this paper is to make the impact of heavy hours more visible by sharing the experiences of the teachers in this study; to conceptualize the heavy hours of teaching; and to raise questions about how understanding and foregrounding the impact of heavy hours might change the way we prepare and support teachers, and the way we advocate for teachers and students.

**Framing the Inquiry: Stories to Stay By**

This research began with a wonder about teachers who stay in teaching. During previous research exploring early career attrition (Beck, 2010), I became intrigued by the assertion that the same feelings that inform a teacher's decision to leave teaching early, may lead those who stay to cling to "practices and attitudes that help them survive but do not serve the education needs of students" (Feiman-Nemser, 2003, p. 25). This statement, written in support of improving teacher induction experiences, hints at the importance of understanding the experiences of teachers over time, and invites a deeper exploration into the complexities of the experiences of those who stay in teaching. As I encountered similar statements (see also Anderson, 2009; Ingersoll, 2002), I became curious about the

space in-between simply surviving in teaching and thriving, and the ways in which that space changes over time as teachers continue their careers. How do teachers who stay negotiate the myriad of competing demands made on them with the limited amounts of energy and resources they have to offer? How do teachers who stay story those times, be they moments or months, when they cannot be the teacher they have in mind?

Framing this narrative inquiry into teachers' stories to stay by is Dewey's ontology of experience (Dewey, 1934/2005, 1938/1997). In order to understand teachers' experiences over time and contexts as they continue to teach, we need to first understand the continuity of experience itself, how "one part carries on what went before" (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 38), how each experience becomes part of the context for later ones. This frames leaving teaching, or staying, or any other single event, as not "a thing happening at that moment, but an expression of something happening over time" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 29).

Dewey's philosophy of experience is described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as a constant "conceptual, imaginative backdrop" (p. 2) to narrative inquiry, the selected methodology for this study. Dewey's philosophy directly shapes the three-dimensional inquiry space: "the personal and social (interaction); past, present, and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation)" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). From this view, experience is storied, continuous, and is constructed through the "confluence of social influences on a person's inner life, social influences on their environment, and their unique personal history" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 41). Dewey (1934/2005) also characterized experience as having an inherently emotional quality. He described this emotional quality of experience as the very part of *an experience* (singular) that separates

it from the whole of *experience* making up our lives. Dewey draws attention to emotions as complex and evolving, as needing to be understood narratively. Often occupying a "marginal role" in teacher education research (Uitto, Jokikokko, & Estola, 2015), teacher emotion can be a neglected aspect not only of teacher stories, but also of teaching practice (Hargreaves, 2000), and the range and complexity of teacher emotion is too little understood (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). Within our discussions of the heavy hours of teaching, emotion was often discussed as a key component of teaching experience.

Within this Deweyan understanding of experience, as continuous, transactional, and emotion-full, there is an entwined understanding of identity. Identity is seen not as an end-point, but as continuously in motion. It is "an ongoing and dynamic process which entails the making sense and (re)interpretation of one's own values and experiences" (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 220). Identity formation occurs always in context, in interaction, as "we respond to the space available by accepting, rejecting, or negotiating [our] role through the way we position ourselves in the space or shape the space to reflect our identity" (Pinnegar, 2005, p. 260). Connelly and Clandinin (1999) conceptualize this ongoing process narratively as "stories to live by," a way of thinking about identity that highlights its inter-connectedness with knowledge and context.

This view of teacher identity – as complex, nuanced, and ever evolving – is often at odds with more dominant, stereotypical understandings of teachers and teaching. Britzman (2003) describes how persistent stereotypes of teachers – such as those portraying teachers as "bookish" or "brainy," or even the stereotypical image of the "good" teacher as "self-sacrificing, kind, overworked, underpaid, and holding an unlimited reservoir of patience" (p. 28) – serve to "engender a static and hence repressed

notion of identity as something already out there, a stability that can be assumed" (p. 29).

These images inform the ideal teacher that teachers hold in mind, resulting in what is at times a considerable distance between this fixed ideal, and the lived and ever-evolving experience of teaching, particularly in the lived experiences within heavy hours. In my inquiry into the experiences of teachers who left teaching early, those moments when teachers could not be the teacher they had in mind were areas of tension, and of confusing and overwhelming emotions (Beck, 2010). Spaces like these might be navigated at times by the creation of "cover stories," defined by Clandinin and Connelly (1996) as those stories that "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. 25). Stories to leave by, or "the stories teachers begin to tell themselves when they can no longer live out their personal practical knowledge in their stories to live by" (Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009, p. 146) are often cover stories. Cover stories do not tell of struggles teachers face in school contexts, but are acceptable stories of leaving, stories such as leaving for graduate school, or parenthood, or a better paying job (Clandinin et al., 2009). These cover stories, themselves an emotional burden, may allow individual teachers to keep their good teacher identity intact but also leave much of their experience hidden from view. I wondered what was hidden from view in teachers' *stories to stay by*, and sought to create a research space where I could invite teachers to more deeply attend and share those stories.

**Entering the Inquiry: Collaborative Exploration**

This inquiry began with an invitation to teachers in their seventh to tenth year of teaching. Teachers were invited to "collaboratively explore their teacher stories" with a

small group of peers over monthly dinners. Our meetings spanned one calendar year and two school years, occurring in March, April, May, and June of one school year, and in October and November of the next. Our conversations, each lasting for two hours, were sometimes gently structured with a question, prompt, or activity, while other conversations were unstructured. Whether or not I offered structure depended on my reflections on the meeting prior, or on what I felt might be most conducive to deepening our conversations. More than once my intentions shifted after arriving and hearing what my research friends [6] had on their minds. Most importantly, I worked to create a space where teachers could shed their cover stories, engage in dialogue with responsive colleagues, and be nourished by a healthy meal and rich conversation.

I recorded audio of our conversations and kept artifacts we occasionally created such as a collage during our first meeting and annals (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of our teaching experiences during our last meeting. I also collected the one-on-one and group emails we exchanged. As I had a long drive to our meetings, I spent a great deal of time listening to audio recordings of our research conversations. These listenings reminded me not just of the words we shared, but also of the non-verbal and/or ambient moments in our discussions. Wanting to keep these memories fresh during the writing process, I continued to listen to the recordings – making notes, sometimes pausing to write narrative or analytical pieces – throughout the recursive analysis and writing process.

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[6] Originally, teachers were invited into this inquiry as "collaborators" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Finley, 2005), reflective of the collaborative nature of the conversations, the transactional ontology upon which the inquiry is framed, and the importance of relationality in narrative inquiry. "Research friends" later emerged as a term by which we could more easily address each other, both to each other and to outsiders. When meeting by chance one day in public for example, Serena introduced me as her "research friend" and I could do the same.

What began to stand out for me most as I listened were those times when we endeavoured to understand and/or explain a particular aspect of teaching experience. Our discussions of the "heavy hours" of teaching and the impact the weight of these hours had for Mara, Carlos, and Serena was one such exploration. Choices made "not to break" in the daily experiences of teachers was another (Beck, in progress), one which became the focal point of a different paper. During these conversations, Mara, Serena, and Carlos at times expressed a wish that some of what we were discovering or articulating would make its way into education-related conversations beyond our own, particularly in conversations about heavy hours, as Serena, Mara, and Carlos felt there exists a fundamental misunderstanding about teacher workload in the dominant narratives of teachers and teaching. I kept this wish in mind as I drafted the final representations of our work together. While most of the words shared are verbatim, the conversations presented here are composed of pieces of the many conversations we had over the year about the heavy hours of teaching and are edited to be clear to readers not present during the original conversations. Carlos, Serena, and Mara had a chance to offer input into this paper so I could ensure their experience was reflected in ways that felt true for them, and to be sure I had not overlooked anything they felt critical to understanding their experiences of heavy hours. This paper is also written in order to offer readers a sense of the pedagogical space this narrative inquiry created (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013), and the potential such spaces offer for sustaining teachers as they compose stories to stay by.

**The Weight of a Heavy Hour: Beyond Teacher Workload**

In the conversations my research friends and I shared, we developed several key understandings that together form one possible description of the heavy hours of teaching. We came back again and again to the complexity characteristic of a heavy hour, and to the ways in which the weight of teaching hours seems to be increasing. Mara, Carlos, and Serena highlighted what were, in their experiences of them, the most salient aspects of heavy hours, aspects that include: rapid professional decision making in the midst of complexity; the reality of being pulled in multiple directions, too many to turn to in an hour; and the residue that lingers long after the hour is over.

**A heavy hour of rapid professional decision-making.** For Carlos, a key difference between a heavy hour of teaching and any other hour is the professional decision-making required while managing the complexities of the classroom environment.

"I think sometime on my second practicum I started to really understand the kinds of decisions I was responsible for as a teacher," he remembers, "beyond the curricular stuff that is. I realized, for example, I have to know whether and if a student can go for a bathroom break now."

Serena, Mara, and I chuckle a bit at Carlos's chosen example of professional decision-making as he continues to explain, "No really, my go-to response, when people ask me why my job is so hard is: 'Can I go to the bathroom now?' And likely that person will laugh and think that I'm joking, but I am really asking them to think about what it would be like to determine whether or not they would allow me to go to the bathroom at that moment. I get asked this question three or four times a day, sometimes 20 times, and

as a teacher, you have to evaluate everything about that decision every time. So 'can I go to the bathroom?' actually means:

What's the classroom environment like at this time?

What is this person's individual history?

What do you know about them?

What do you know about the kind of school it is?

Is it a Friday? Or a Monday?

Is it the afternoon or is it the morning?

Has this person been successful or not successful?

Are they asking for a break?

Are they asking this because they need a personality break from the people

in the room?

Is it the kind of work in which a break would be more helpful to their

future success?

Or is it the kind of break that is actually detrimental to the work that you're

doing in the classroom?

Are they leaving other students behind?

Is the nature of the work such that the students can continue without that

person there?

And if they cannot then maybe this break should be scheduled for another

time.

How close are you to the end of class?

If you do not provide that release are they going to become more difficult

to handle, so much so that they remove resources that could be better spent

on other students?"

Mara replies, laughing, "and all they've asked is, 'can I go to the bathroom?'"

"And that's not even the biggest doozy of a question you're going to get in that

hour," Serena adds, "that's one of the relatively simple ones. Most of the decisions we'll

make in that hour are much more complex."

As I thought more deeply about Carlos's description of his thought processes in

response to the bathroom question, I turned to the literature for resonant descriptions of

the professional decision-making of teachers. Biesta's (2015) description of teacher

professional "judgement" and Brante's (2009) articulation of the "synchronous work" of

teaching both reflect something of Carlos's experience. Biesta (2015) defines teacher

judgement as a process through which teachers prioritize the oscillating, sometimes

compatible, and sometimes opposing goals of education: qualification, subjectification,

and socialization. [7] Brante (2009) offers the concept of synchronous work which makes

visible the many goals teachers are holding at once in each teaching hour.[8] The factors

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[7] Qualification "has to do with the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, skills and dispositions," while socialization is how, "through education we also represent and initiate children and young people in traditions and ways of being and doing, such as cultural, professional, political, religious traditions, etc.," and subjectification refers to the ways in which education influences individual students as people (Biesta, 2015, p. 77).

[8] Brante (2009) offers multiple sets of concept-pairs that must be held at once and together in the work of teaching. The base pair she offers is "content and relation" (p. 434). Teachers must, in every teaching hour, attend to the content to be taught, and the multiple relationships which are present. Within "content" further concept-pairings must also be held: "knowledge and norms and values" and "invasive work and hidden curriculum" among others. Within "relation" the further pairs of "pupil influence and power" and "pupils as individuals and pupils as a group" and others must also be held in synchronous fashion. Brante asserts that navigating the tensions between the concept pairs is work that includes a moral dimension, and that this work is profoundly

that Carlos reflects upon when he responds to the bathroom question reflect his

consideration of competing goals and tensions as he wonders if the bathroom break

would help or hinder the student or class's curricular work, or perhaps offer a needed

"break" of another kind. As Carlos moves through his day, he is holding these

interconnected factors in tension, weighing the importance of each in an ongoing way

over time within the relational, always evolving context of the classroom, and within the

time given in each heavy hour. The professional space in which Carlos can hold these

tensions, in which to be responsive to students as individuals and as a group, and to make

decisions that are best in each moment, is, for Carlos, a defining aspect of being a

professional, and is key to differentiating a heavy hour of teaching from any other hour of

work.

"I feel it's this kind of complexity, involved in the heavy hour itself, that is not

really well understood by outsiders," Carlos speculates.

"No, it's not," Serena agrees, "and all of those factors that we're talking about –

class size, class composition, curricular changes, certain accountability measures – all of

these things add to the weight of that hour."

Serena here highlights the tendency to link increased class size with more work

before or after class (more photocopying or marking for example). However, when linked

to those experiences related to professional decision-making *within* a heavy hour, more

students means more decisions, and it means each decision is more complex. When we

consider that in Carlos's decision-making processes he considers whether and what

influenced by the "organizational and spatial-temporal structures particular to the teaching
profession that more or less force the practitioners to handle work in certain ways" (p. 435).

impact one student taking a break will have on others, with more students there are more others, or more factors to consider. The classroom environment increases in complexity because there are more students interacting not just with the teacher, but also with each other. Likewise, when the composition of a class becomes more diverse, the complexity of each decision increases in similar ways. While additional marking is problematic, the increased weight of the hour itself weighed more heavily for Carlos, Mara, and Serena.

Some of the other factors Serena mentions – curricular changes and accountability measures – also increase the complexity of the heavy hour as they serve to constrict the professional space teachers have in which to use their own judgement. Mara keenly experienced this as she described her school district's frequent introduction of "flavour-of-the-month" literacy programs, some of which included student assessments requiring a large portion of class time. With each accountability measure or learning strategy that she was required to implement, the space she had in her classroom to enact her own professional judgement diminished. Biesta (2015) and Brante (2009) both echo this as they describe how the professional space teachers work within is being constricted and scrutinized in ways that limit an individual teacher's ability to act in autonomous, relational, and responsive ways. These restrictions, felt as an increase in complexity and difficulty within those heavy hours, add again to their weight.

**A heavy hour of being pulled in multiple directions simultaneously.** For Mara, another key feature of a heavy hour is being pulled in too many different directions at the same time.

"This year has been a real challenge," Mara says of her elementary class, "at the start of the school year I had three students who I knew would need a lot of additional

help, those three students were struggling with attention deficit, autism, literacy setbacks, among other things. I knew it was going to be difficult without an aide in the room, which we lost due to cuts. But then about a week into the year, a new student was added to my class. She was experiencing some extreme social and family issues, in addition to struggling with literacy. Then the very next day, yet another student was added, a newcomer to Canada just beginning with English and struggling with some extreme behaviour issues. So, these are five very high needs students in my class, and I knew I would never be able to get to them all. I watched them and I think, if I could work with them one-on-one, I could move them forward, I could change their lives. But the reality of working in a class with no aide is that I feel constantly pulled in a million different directions, and it's impossible."

"In some ways, you're actually prevented from doing your job," Serena summarizes.

"Yes," Mara agrees. "I'm watching these kids falling between the cracks, and I find myself detaching from the students. I feel shut-off because there's no aide, no support, and I'm over-stressed. If you have some supports in place it's easy to keep giving to your students, but with no supports you just enter self-preservation mode."

"Well without the aide you have to turn your attention away from certain students," Carlos reflects, "because if you don't, they'll end up taking all of your time with the moment-to-moment. I had three students with autism in one class last year, and when the aide wasn't there, they got busy work, and that's just how it had to be."

"Yes, I've done that," Mara admits, "with one student sometimes I just say, 'you don't have to do this, just go read a book,' because literally five other students are

clamouring for my attention. And I feel guilty about it, and I want to help, and I know I have the skill-set to help, but there's not enough time in that hour, and I'm constantly putting out little fires. The worst though, is that when I share these struggles, the response I get most often is: 'you have to teach differently.'"

"Differentiate, right?" Serena adds, "Somehow if you could just teach 12 different things at once you could be meeting everyone's needs."

"Yes. But I can't always differentiate for behaviour, and for some students, if they don't get the care they need, they're off in all directions. Ideally, you have that support from admin, from aides – you want them to honour the craft of teaching along with you, but when you can't really teach, you're just passing time."

Mara's description of "passing time" rather than "teaching" in the classroom as a result of the multiple, simultaneous demands she experiences prompted me to search for similar discussions from other educators. Wiebe and MacDonald (2014) offer a discussion that extends and critiques Hargreaves's (1994) treatment of the "intensification thesis."[9] They wonder why it is that a common administrative response to increased workload – more preparation time – fails to ameliorate teachers' experiences of work intensification. Reflecting on teacher narratives they gathered during a large research project, Wiebe and MacDonald (2014) theorize that it is not just that teachers have too much to do, it is that there is not enough space for the expressions of teaching that teachers find most valuable:

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[9] Hargreaves (1994) draws on the work of Larson and Apple to define the "intensification thesis" as a concept describing how the work of teachers has undergone a "bureaucratically driven escalation of pressures, expectations and controls concerning what teachers do," (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 108) most of which serve to routinize the work of teaching, thereby reducing the space teachers have to exercise their own professionalism, to be relational with their students, and time they might have for self-care.

Teachers, meanwhile, want to "teach." The heart that holds this conviction

is at bottom a heart aspiring to and professing a need to personally care for

the individual student … that moment, the pedagogical moment of

interpersonal relationship, the moment a student says "a-ha" – for many,

this is the moment that teachers appear most determined to hold fast and

bear witness. It is, sadly, a moment for which not enough time has been

made. (p. 22)

Wiebe and MacDonald (2014) note that providing teachers "more time" to complete tasks

such as marking, planning, or accountability paperwork, does not create space for these

moments of pedagogical relationships, but in fact takes teachers further away from them

by taking teachers out of the classroom, an experience lamented by teachers in their

study. Mara, in her wish for administrative and support staff to honour the craft of

teaching along with her, is likewise calling our attention to the sacredness of the

classroom space, of that context that holds the possibility of those educative moments.

This is something that the conceptualization of the term heavy hours also seeks to

explore. Mara feels that the heavy hours she is currently experiencing do not offer the

context for those moments. Yet, when she tries to articulate this, it is suggested that she

just needs to "teach differently," feedback which might encourage internalized feelings of

guilt or failure. There is a need to recognize that making space for the work of teaching,

the part of that work most valued and precious to teachers and students, cannot be placed

on teachers' shoulders alone, nor it is solely the work of balancing the equation of time.

More importantly it is balancing the conditions before, after, and especially within each

heavy hour. For Mara, without the right balance within the hour, without the opportunity for those pedagogical moments, she is just passing time.

This experience of passing time, of feeling stressed, of self-preservation mode, Mara is able to contrast directly with the teaching experience she had two years prior. That year, her strong relationships with the administration left her feeling supported, appreciated, and respected as an educator. She had a manageable class size and the composition of the class was such that the students as a group were positive and receptive to her.

"I would literally hum everyday," Mara reminisces, "the students would comment, 'Oh Ms. M., you're always singing,' and we had such a lovey-dovey classroom. I found myself able to do so many fun things – skits, recipes – it was just so fun! And I *know* the students learned so much that year."

Knowing the pedagogical space possible in her classroom serves to highlight for Mara what is missing. While she recognizes that the conditions within the heavy hour are leaving her few options, and that as a professional responsible for the safety of her students, choosing to manage the class as a whole instead of offering support to struggling students individually is the only choice she can legally and responsibly make, she still knows she is doing less than her best, and must still navigate her feelings of guilt about that.

**A heavy hour and its lingering residue.** Serena's experiences in her large high school humanities classes are, like Carlos's, full of rapid professional decision-making amidst growing complexity, and like Mara's, are full of things left undone at the end of the hour. After two years of a 7-out-of-8 course load, Serena articulates how the

experience of back-to-back heavy hours lingers, and how adding another heavy hour is significant not just because it means more preparation and evaluation, but significant because, by the end of each day, Serena does not have the time or capacity to process another heavy hour, and the weight lingers.

"What I'm finding especially hard is that the social-emotional needs of students are surprisingly off-the-wall," Serena explains.

"Yes," Carlos agrees, "I've had that conversation with one of my veteran colleagues who has noticed the same shift."

"I am really shocked by the amount of stuff I feel I need to be a psychologist for," Serena continues, "students who have been jumped, brothers on cocaine, severe depression. This is not me having long conversations with students, this is what is right on the surface in their essays, it's severe!"

"My colleague, who is in her 25th year of teaching says there are way more depression, dating issues, and similar things than ever before," Carlos adds, "and she says she feels it's all more present in the classroom than it ever was before. Something about this generation maybe."

"You're right, maybe it is the Facebook generation where they're used to putting everything out there online. But I find it very taxing. And sometimes it's not things they tell me directly, but just things I overhear. For example, based on one conversation I heard happen near me I worried that something bad was going to happen at a party that weekend. And part of me was like 'okay, do I have to talk to this girl? It seems like she might be putting herself in harm's way, like this might be a potential date-rape situation.'" Serena describes how, after too many heavy hours, after being pulled in too

many different directions at once, some of these social-emotional concerns are ones she has to let go. "It's really hard for me to shut down on that kind of thing, but I feel I almost have to," Serena explains.

"Well, because it's constant," Carlos affirms, "and we know this about teenagers, that everything gets to alert status really fast. As adults, you can't take it all on, because it starts to affect you. But it's getting harder and harder to differentiate between the more typical teenage urgency and real urgency."

"Well, and what kind of intervention is really possible in the heavy hour? The conversation I needed to have with her needed to last longer than the 10 seconds I had to spare, and really, it would have been reckless to intervene in a haphazard way. Asking for counselling support isn't an option either as any kind of psychology positions in the school have been reduced to minimum levels," Serena adds. "Then there's the spill-over, with no preps and with the weight of those hours there is so much more evening psychic time. Like during exam week, those are all light hours, people don't get that." The four of us consider friends and family members who have jobs that while *busy*, may not be *heavy* with residue. "When my fiancé does two hours on a Saturday during his busy season for example, he's done after those two hours," Serena notes, "but if I'm marking on a Saturday, I'm thinking of all those kids and the stories stay with me: thoughts of their academic success, etc. And marking, that's just normal teaching. With 22 students, I'm taking the time to intervene about the potential date rape, with 36 I can't, I'm more likely to take the attitude 'it will be okay,' but I'm also more likely to suffer from that later on too."

The term *residue* denotes simply that which is left behind (*Residue*, online etymology dictionary). For Serena, the residue of heavy hours played a significant part in her eventual decision to leave the school district in which she was required to teach a 7-out-of-8 course load. Serena describes the "psychic spill-over" of heavy hours, the residue of rapid professional decision-making amidst complexity and from being pulled in too many directions simultaneously. This residue includes the more routine reflection on decisions made within each heavy hour, in addition to reflection on the excess of things that could not be attended to within that hour. For Serena and Mara, the decisions made in order to simply survive the heavy hour and those things left undone also leave a residue more challenging to process – feelings of guilt. Some of the guilt Serena and Mara described is reflective of the "depressive guilt" and the "guilt-traps" described by Hargreaves (1994, pp. 144-145).[10] For Serena though, particularly in the example of not intervening when she suspected student social plans might lead to a less-than-safe social situation for one of her students, the guilt lingers, becoming a kind of *moral residue*:

> …that which each of us carries with us from those times … [when we]
>
> have seriously compromised ourselves or allowed ourselves to be
>
> compromised. These times are usually very painful because they threaten
>
> or sometimes betray deeply held and cherished beliefs and values.
>
> (Webster & Baylis, 2000, p. 218)

Adding an extra heavy hour adds more residue, the residue might be routine professional reflection, unpacking all those professional-decisions made in complex spaces, regret or

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[10] Hargreaves (1994) describes in detail the nexus of four aspects of teachers' work that create conditions of "constraint and expectation" conducive to feelings of guilt. These four aspects are: teachers' commitment to caring, the open-ended nature of teacher work, pressures of accountability and intensification, and the individual teacher's "persona of perfectionism" (pp. 144-151).

guilt about not being able to meet the needs of students, or a kind of moral distress that begs existential questions about who we are not only as teachers but also as people.

"Really, 7-out-of-8 was physically untenable," Serena reflects after leaving the district in which this was the required teaching load, "And I feel like, in the long-run, if you are working at that pace, and then you have a health problem or a young child, then that would be nervous breakdown time." The weight of heavy hours for Serena was such that she was always at the edge of her capacity or beyond. Not only did the weight linger at the end of each day, semester, and school year, but this weight takes up those resources that might be otherwise spent managing those other aspects of life that inevitably arise.

**Discussion: A Heavy Hour Happens all at Once**

As Lampert (2003) articulates, the work of teaching is complex in that "many of the problems teachers must address to get students to learn occur simultaneously, not one after another. Because of this simultaneity, several different problems must be addressed by a single action" (p. 2). The term heavy hours addresses the complexity or simultaneity that Lampert and others describe, while also considering that heavy hours have now become so complex that teacher actions, even actions which address "several different problems" are insufficient to address everything occurring within the boundary of each hour. The combination of the increasing complexity and simultaneity within the hour and the things left undone at the end of an hour leave a residue for teachers that must also be considered.

As I searched available literature for resonant descriptions of some or all of the components of heavy hours, I became more keenly aware of the understandable tendency that Education research has to inquire into one or another singular aspect of teaching

practice. In doing so, the components of a heavy hour are fractured in ways that can oversimplify the complexity of teachers' experiences, in ways that erase the significant boundary of an hour, and in ways that tend to neglect the impact of their weight for individual teachers. Biesta (2015), Brante (2009), and Wiebe and MacDonald (2014) whose work is shared above, are some of those researchers offering discussion of the simultaneous experiences an hour of teaching contains. Research like this shares my own goal of moving beyond or enriching understandings of teachers' work as more than having merely "intensified" in the sense of increased workload. More than an imbalance between "work" and "life," more than simply not having "enough time," the work of teaching is suffering from an increase of intensity more insidious and pervasive in nature. Teachers are struggling to find a way to hold the multiple and increasing demands of teaching within the confines of each heavy hour in ways that allow them to create educative environments with and for their students.

Even in this paper, three of the most salient aspects of heavy hours experienced by Serena, Carlos, and Mara have been artificially separated in order to be fully explored. The final key to an understanding of the weight of a heavy hour may be to recognize that all aspects of the heavy hour combine in unique ways in each moment, and their interactions also add weight. For example, as Serena is overhearing social events unfolding in the classroom, she is also making back-to-back professional decisions in the complex classroom environment. She is also being pulled in too many directions, while carrying the lingering residue of moments passed. While holding all of this, she is also carrying the needs and wants of her district, school, and administration as they make

accountability and curricular demands that she must meet, and this too is adding to the new residue she will carry forward into the hours ahead.

**Going Forward: What the Concept of Heavy Hours Adds to Understanding Teacher Practice**

Mara, Serena, Carlos, and I began this exploration with a wonder about why adding one more class to a teacher's day is such a huge change for teachers. During this exploration, we felt the lack of a concept describing the ways in which teachers experience those contact hours, and the ways in which their work is intensifying. We considered that it is more than just an issue of "workload" or "multitasking," or even "intensification" (Biesta, 2015; Brante, 2009; Wiebe & MacDonald, 2014).

"Workload is really not about how many hours we're in the building," Serena suggests, "the willingness to stay late or to work weekends for example is actually irrelevant to how much can be accomplished in the hour. People don't understand that you can't always be employing every bell and whistle at once."

The term "heavy hours" draws our attention to the key importance of that boundary of time. Even though teaching hours look no different from the outside, what is expected within each hour is ever-increasing. Teachers cannot simply work longer to accomplish these tasks, as the heavy teaching hour ends and the students go home. Rather, they are left with all that they failed to accomplish within the boundaries of those earlier hours. Serena, Mara, Carlos, and I also discussed how the heavy hours of teaching do not really "get better" over the course of a career. Rather, the weight of teaching hours will change from year to year with new students, with changes to official curriculum, with fluctuating funding for aides or psychology staff within schools, with new

administrations, with changes to accountability measures, and more. While the ideal of teaching may, from a beginner's perspective, be one of an upward trajectory towards greater and greater professional success, this may not be the lived experience of teaching. Mara described her 5th year of teaching as far more professionally satisfying than her 7th. This can be a confusing experience for teachers composing stories to stay by, as what they are able to accomplish in the classroom is not always reflective of the refined pedagogical knowledge and skills that experience has earned them. This has a significant impact for teacher identity. As they are composing their stories to stay by, they might be imagining that they will inch closer and closer to the teacher they have in mind. The inability to compose that story can cause teachers to experience dissonance and to feel guilt or shame at not doing their best. Without the concept of heavy hours, it is possible for teachers to feel that depressive guilt Hargreaves (1994) describes, and to blame themselves for their perceived shortcomings. If, as Dewey (1934/2005) suggests, emotion colours experience, then there is a danger that feelings of guilt, moral distress, and moral residue may prevent teachers from feeling they are accomplishing anything at all in the classroom. As Mara describes, they may instead just feel as though they are "passing time."

Since, as a relational profession requiring rapid professional decision-making, the hours of teaching will always be heavy, understanding and then foregrounding the experience and impact of heavy hours has important consequences for the work of teaching, and for the work of those seeking to support teachers. For teacher educators, the term heavy hours offers a way to discuss the challenges of teaching with beginning teachers, and demands that the skills required to "do" the heavy hours of teaching be

explicitly addressed. Meeting the challenges of teaching is not just about a willingness to work long hours, it is about managing the weight within each hour, and then managing the lingering and complex residue each hour leaves behind. For administration, considering the weight of heavy hours might demand they also question how those hours can be made light enough to be tenable, especially in districts where another heavy hour is added. This may change the way in which courses are timetabled, the composition of each class, the way in which new initiatives are introduced, or how funding for support staff is prioritized. Recognition that there are very real limits to the weight individual teachers can carry in a given school year might be key to supporting individual teachers. This recognition may also encourage teachers to support each other more effectively over time. For teachers themselves, being able to highlight hours that are particularly heavy may give them a new way to advocate for their students. For example, when asked to add a specific type of assessment or accountability strategy to a class, they may be able to articulate the reasons why they cannot do so while continuing to manage the existing complexity of the classroom space in a way that benefits their students. It is also important to recognize that particularly heavy hours and the residue they leave behind may contribute to experiences of burnout that develop and accumulate overtime. Burnout is a psychological syndrome characterized by "overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment … and a sense of ineffectiveness" (Maslach, 2006, p. 38). Ideally, when teachers enter the classroom they will be offered a context that allows them to draw on and live out their personal practical knowledge, and to respond to the needs of their students in positive ways.

Finally, the development of the concept of heavy hours is reflective of the richness inherent in close attention to the experiences of teachers. If we are to fully understand and effectively support teachers in their work, we first need to understand their experiences from their perspective. Additionally, we need spaces in which cover stories can be shed, and that ever-evolving space between the ideal teacher in mind and the lived and often contradictory experiences of teaching might be explored and deeply attended. The narrative inquiry space in which four research friends could come together for food and conversation offered one such space, a space Serena, Carlos, and Mara felt did not commonly exist in their experience of schools.

## Chapter 4

### Choosing Not to Break: The Daily Decisions of Teachers who Stay

*"I've already decided I'm not going to break myself over it. Now I just need*

*to be okay with that decision."* Carlos[11]

**Introduction: Change in an Instant**

  **Fall.** Mara and I are sitting at Carlos's dining room table talking about teeth. It is

our first research dinner together since breaking for summer. Serena, the fourth in our

group of research friends, has just texted to say she is a few minutes away. Carlos has just

had a wisdom tooth out, which is why our conversation has tended towards dentists and

dental procedures. Carlos is saying the pain is not that bad now, two days post extraction,

but he is saying this from afar. I am reminded of this as I listen once again to the audio

recording of our conversation. I hear Carlos's voice from a distance as he paces between

rooms, I hear cupboard and closet doors opening and closing.

  "What are you doing Carlos?" I ask, projecting my voice through the halls.

  "I'm looking for my tablecloth," comes the reply. I look at the dining room table

where Mara and I are sitting. There is a computer, books, pens, highlighters – all the

trappings of a Sunday spent marking or planning. There is no tablecloth.

  "You don't need to be fancy for us," Mara shouts.

  "I know, I know," Carlos responds. "In the grand scheme of things I know it

doesn't really matter, but if I can find it in a minute of two it will be worth it – I like

getting to use it. Jaime, there is no timer set, are you just keeping track in your head?"

  "Yes, I think I've got it," I reply, looking at the clock to make sure I am not

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[11] "Carlos," "Mara," and "Serena" are the self-selected pseudonyms of the three teachers who
participated in this inquiry, which is described in greater detail below.

overheating the quinoa lasagna I have prepared for dinner. Mara and I continue to chat, with Carlos sometimes contributing from a distance. The tablecloth is found, but Carlos doesn't sit. Instead he offers us coffee or tea, talking rapidly about how he is going to have coffee but there is no milk or sugar so maybe we want tea or water, he can make us soda water too, if we want. I become aware that this level of hosting is uncharacteristic of Carlos, or of our meetings generally, regardless of the host. The help-ourselves rhythm of our meetings happened naturally from the beginning, making the shift of this evening even more apparent.

"You seem a bit unsettled," I offer.

"Yeah," Carlos replies, now standing beside us at the table. "I don't know why, I have felt unsettled all weekend. I actually feel a bit better today." The three of us talk about how it's October in Canada and the colder weather has settled, the long dark encroaching on the daylight. Soon teachers and students will both arrive to and leave school in the dark. It makes sense to be unsettled this time of year. Yet the unrest itself is unusual for Carlos. At the beginning of our inquiry together months before, Carlos could easily declare that he "loved his job." Mara and Serena could not so easily make similar declarations at the time…

**Earlier that year.** In the spring of the previous school year we had our first dinner conversation and Mara, Carlos, and Serena each shared a bit about their experiences in teaching. Mara's year marked her seventh in teaching and her return to her elementary school position after a two-month leave. She was considering another leave for the school year ahead.

"With all the recent cutbacks, our school lost half its teacher aides," Mara

explained. "I had some really difficult students added to my class and I feel like – well – it's just so hard to watch them slip through the cracks. If you asked my beginning teacher self, this is just not something I was ever going to let happen. I was so idealistic then. I don't feel idealistic anymore. I guess you lose that along the way."

Serena, in her ninth year of teaching and teaching high school Social Studies and English courses at the time was the first to respond, "I feel I haven't lost my idealism completely, but I definitely feel more ground down," she said as she pressed a fist downwards into the open palm of her other hand. "I wonder sometimes what I'm giving up in the other parts of my life, and for how much longer I can continue to give those things up. I wonder about teaching for the long term."

Carlos, after a long pause, responded with surprise, "I've literally never felt that. I haven't lost my idealism. I mean, after seven years, it's more based in reality, but I still think, on a week-to-week basis, how am I going to change my students' lives? I think about what I would be giving up in order to take a year leave. I mean, I love my job."

"I loved my job two years ago," Mara reflected, her voice full of longing, "but that moment just didn't last."

"Well, that really scares me," Carlos admitted, "because that means things could change in an instant."

Carlos's comment foreshadowed the change about to happen in his teaching assignment, a change he learned about just before our fourth meeting in June. Due to fluctuations in enrolment, Carlos was timetabled to teach an anomalous English class that disrupted his full-time Drama course load. His decision during that June meeting was clear: "I've already decided I'm not going to break myself over it, now I just need to be

okay with that decision." What this comment also foreshadowed was the tension he was experiencing by our October meeting as he was living out and living with his choice.

**Purpose: To Sustain, not to Break**

*Break*, from Old English *brecan*, meaning "to shatter, burst; injure, violate, destroy, or curtail," (*Break*, online etymology dictionary) is a powerful and apt metaphor introduced by Carlos, and one used often in our research conversations thereafter. It became our way to refer to the lived negotiations teachers make in their day-to-day lives in order to *sustain* themselves or their teaching practice in some way. *Sustain* here is more than simply staying in teaching, it is the ability to support or maintain one's identity in teaching, one's stories to live by (Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009). Etymologically, *sustain* evokes ideas of "holding up," of "enduring without failing or yielding" (*Sustain*, online etymology dictionary), without yielding those parts of practice key to identity, or without failing in critical areas of self-care. During my first teaching experience in a university setting after leaving the K-12 classroom two years prior, I intentionally made choices not to break and these negotiations were at the foreground of my experience. Therefore, at the outset of this inquiry I had wondered if teachers who stayed in the K-12 classroom also experienced these kinds of negotiations. In the conversations I had with Carlos, Serena, and Mara though, the question of *if* seemed readily assumed; that these choices happened was easily agreed upon. We focused instead the experience of first making, and then living out, and living with, the complex, moral, and continuing decisions made in order not to break. The purpose of this paper is to explore some of the understandings of these experiences that we shared, and to begin a discussion about what these understandings might mean for preservice and ongoing

teacher education.

**Framing the Inquiry: Stories to Stay By**

During previous research exploring early career attrition (Beck, 2010), I became intrigued by the notion that the same feelings that inform a teacher's decision to leave teaching, may also lead those who stay to cling to "practices and attitudes that help them survive but do not serve the education needs of students" (Feiman-Nemser, 2003, p. 25). Written in support of improving teacher induction experiences, this statement hints at the importance of understanding the experiences of teachers over time, and invites a deeper exploration into the complexities of the experiences of those who stay in teaching. As I read this assertion and others like it (see also Anderson, 2009; Ingersoll, 2002), I felt an invitation to explore the space in-between simply surviving in teaching and thriving in teaching, and to explore how that space changes over time for teachers as they enter their seventh to tenth year in the profession. How do teachers who stay negotiate the myriad of competing demands made on them with the limited amounts of energy and resources they have to offer? How do teachers who stay story those times, be they moments or months, when they cannot be the teacher they have in mind? As I explored choices made not to break with Mara, Carlos, and Serena, I also wondered how those choices continue to shape the experience of teachers who stay.

When viewed from within the Deweyan ontology framing this narrative inquiry (Dewey, 1934/2005), understanding this continuity of experience is key to understanding experience itself. In order to understand teachers' experiences over time and contexts as they continue to teach, we need to first understand how each experience becomes part of the context for later ones. This frames leaving teaching, or staying, or any other single

event, as not "a thing happening at that moment, but an expression of something happening over time" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 29). Dewey's philosophy of experience is described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as a constant "conceptual, imaginative backdrop" (p. 2) to narrative inquiry. Dewey's philosophy directly shapes the three-dimensional inquiry space: "the personal and social (interaction); past, present, and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation)" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). From this view, experience is storied, continuous, and is constructed through the "confluence of social influences on a person's inner life, social influences on their environment, and their unique personal history" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 41).

Dewey (1934/2005) also characterized experience as having an inherently emotional quality. He described this emotional quality of experience as the very part of *an experience* (singular) that separates it from the whole of *experience* making up our lives. Dewey draws attention to emotions as complex and evolving, as needing to be understood narratively. Often occupying a "marginal role" in teacher education research (Uitto, Jokikokko, & Estola, 2015), teacher emotion can be a neglected aspect not only of teacher stories, but also of teaching practice (Hargreaves, 2000), and the range and complexity of teacher emotion is too little understood (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). Emotions were described by Serena, Mara, and Carlos as always present in the process of choosing not to break, and this emotional colouring both shaped, and was shaped by, their experiences of these choices.

Within this Deweyan understanding of experience, as continuous, transactional, and emotion-full, is an entwined understanding of identity. Identity is seen not as an end-

point, but as continuously in motion. It is "an ongoing and dynamic process which entails the making sense and (re)interpretation of one's own values and experiences" (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 220). Identity formation occurs always in context, in interaction, as "we respond to the space available by accepting, rejecting, or negotiating [our] role through the way we position ourselves in the space or shape the space to reflect our identity" (Pinnegar, 2005, p. 260). Connelly and Clandinin (1999) conceptualize this ongoing process narratively as "stories to live by," a way of thinking about identity that highlights its inter-connectedness with knowledge and context.

This view of teacher identity – as complex, nuanced, and ever evolving – is often at odds with more dominant, stereotypical understandings of teachers and teaching. Britzman (2003) describes how persistent stereotypes of teachers – such as those portraying teachers as "bookish" or "brainy," or even the stereotypical image of the "good" teacher as "self-sacrificing, kind, overworked, underpaid, and holding an unlimited reservoir of patience" (p. 28) – serve to "engender a static and hence repressed notion of identity as something already out there, a stability that can be assumed" (p. 29). For teachers then, there can be a considerable distance between the fixed ideal of the teacher in mind, which is informed by these stereotypes, and the lived and ever-evolving experience of teaching. In my inquiry into the experiences of teachers who left teaching early, the space between the ideal teacher in mind and lived stories was an area of tension, and of confusing and overwhelming emotions (Beck, 2010). Spaces like these might be navigated at times by the creation of "cover stories," defined by Clandinin and Connelly (1996) as those stories that "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. 25). Stories to leave by, or "the stories teachers begin to tell themselves when they can no longer live out their personal practical knowledge in their stories to live by" (Clandinin et al., 2009, p. 146) are often cover stories. The cover stories do not tell of struggles teachers face in school contexts, but are acceptable stories of leaving, stories such as leaving for graduate school, or parenthood, or a better paying job (Clandinin et al., 2009). These cover stories, while allowing individual teachers to keep their good teacher identity intact, leave much of their experience hidden from view. I wondered what was hidden from view in teachers' stories to stay by, and sought to create a research space where I could more deeply attend those stories alongside teachers.

**Entering the Inquiry: Collaborative Exploration**

Teachers in their seventh to tenth year of teaching were invited into this inquiry to "collaboratively explore their teacher stories" with a small group of peers over monthly dinners. Our meetings spanned one calendar year and two school years, occurring in March, April, May, and June of one school year, and in October and November of the next. Our conversations, each lasting for two hours, were sometimes gently structured with a question, prompt, or activity, while other conversations were unstructured. Whether or not I offered structure depended on my reflections on the meeting prior, or on what I felt might be most conducive to deepening our conversations. More than once my intentions shifted after arriving and hearing what my research friends [12] had on their minds. Most importantly, I worked to create a space where teachers could shed their

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[12] Originally, teachers were invited into this inquiry as "collaborators" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Finley, 2005), reflective of the collaborative nature of the conversations, the transactional ontology upon which the inquiry is framed, and the importance of relationality in narrative inquiry. "Research friends" later emerged as a term by which we could more easily address each other, both to each other and to outsiders. When meeting by chance one day in public for example, Serena introduced me as her "research friend" and I could do the same.

cover stories, engage in dialogue with responsive colleagues, and be nourished by a healthy meal and rich conversation.

I recorded audio of our conversations and kept artifacts we occasionally created such as a collage during our first meeting and annals (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of our teaching experiences during our last meeting. I also collected the one-on-one and group emails we exchanged. As I had a long drive to our meetings, I spent a great deal of time listening to audio recordings of our research conversations. These listenings reminded me not just of the words we shared, but also of the non-verbal and/or ambient moments in our discussions, like the conversation Mara and I had with Carlos from a distance shared above. Wanting to keep these memories fresh during the writing process, I continued to listen to the recordings – making notes, sometimes pausing to write narrative or analytical pieces – throughout the recursive analysis and writing process.

What began to stand out for me most as I listened were those times when we endeavoured to understand and/or explain a particular aspect of teaching experience. Choices made "not to break," or rather the experiences of first making, and then living out, and living with those choices, was one topic we kept circling in our conversations. The experience and residue of the "heavy hours" of teaching was another, becoming the focal point of a different paper (Beck, in progress). During these conversations, Mara, Serena, and Carlos at times expressed a wish that some of what we were discovering or articulating would make its way into education-related conversations beyond our own. I kept this wish in mind as I drafted the final representations of our work together. Within this paper, the conversations shared are composed of pieces of the many conversations we had over the year. While the majority of the words are verbatim, they are edited for

cohesion and written to share not only our co-composed understandings, but also to invite the reader to experience what these conversations were for us, to give readers a sense of the pedagogical space this narrative inquiry created (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013), and the potential such spaces offer for sustaining teachers as they compose stories to stay by. Serena, Carlos, and Mara also had a chance to offer input into this paper so I could ensure their experience was reflected in a way that felt true for them, and to be sure I had not overlooked anything they felt critical to understanding their experiences of choices made not to break.

**Choosing Not to Break: The Daily Decisions of Teachers who Stay**

Choices, in and of themselves, are a ubiquitous part of the teaching life. There is something unique though about choices made not to break, choices that the four us identified as not usually explicitly explored in the everyday discussions of teacher experience. As we explored the choices Serena, Carlos, and Mara each made not to break, these daily decisions began to emerge as: necessary because of an outside factor or imposed decision that then shaped part or all of their school year and therefore their whole lives in a significant way; as requiring further compromise, after the initial experience of feeling compromised; and as *continuing*, as leaving a residue that must then itself be negotiated.

**Necessary choices.** Choices made not to break were described by Carlos, Mara, and Serena as necessary in response to what they experienced as a rather surprising instability within their teaching lives. The experience of being in a frequent or even constant state of change and negotiation stands in opposition to the portrait usually painted of teachers who stay. Beginning teachers might imagine a few challenging years

of uncertainty, followed by a relatively stable and fixed teaching assignment, and therefore teaching experience. In discussing the negotiations of teachers who stay though, Serena reflected that "what beginning teachers might not realize, is how often these negotiations happen. It isn't just once, but every year, every semester, or every time your personal circumstances change – way more often than I would have thought."

For Serena a shifting context was the norm for her beginning years as she moved from: supply teaching in the city where she completed her teacher education program, to teaching internationally, to teaching in a Canadian private school, and finally, to teaching in a rural public high school in Alberta. While she was making these intentional shifts that characterized her beginning years, she was imagining that stability remained just over the horizon.

"I learned a lot in all the places I taught," Serena explained, "and I was able to dismiss, or at least not focus on, some of the more discouraging aspects of each experience, because I knew the situation was temporary. Instead I just kept looking forward to the day when I would get what I would have then called a 'real teaching job.' When I finally ended up in a public high school, I quickly realized that the kind of stability I was imagining is not really out there. What I know now is that teaching does not really abate. In some ways, it doesn't really get better."

"I know what you mean," Mara agreed. "Even though I have always been at the same school, things are always changing and the job just doesn't get easier. I feel like I'm always having to spend time and energy incorporating 'flavor-of-the-month' initiatives. On top of that, I just haven't had reliable support from administration since my first principal left."

"I don't think I would have understood where you were coming from when we first met last year," Carlos shared, "but this year that timetable change caught me off-guard and it has been challenging for me for sure. My first few years of teaching were what you might expect: I taught a lot of different things before getting the Drama courses I wanted. But since then, I've had a really good run of stability. Now though, I understand that feeling of being vulnerable, of not being in control."

This experience of not being in control is reflected in Kelchtermans's (2013) assertion that vulnerability is "a structural characteristic of the profession" in part because "teachers' working conditions are to a large extent imposed on them" (p. 391). That particular school year Serena and Carlos both faced courses they had not expected to teach, and Serena was continuing to face an increase in her course load, from six classes each school year to seven, first implemented two years prior. Carlos's district seemed ready to make a similar change to course load, so in addition to the unexpected English class, he also faced an increase in heavy hours. Mara, while teaching the same grade two class for several years, was still often surprised with varying levels of available supports from administration and from teacher aides, with new initiatives that required implementation, and with students joining her class as the year went on, students who needed extra attention and time in a classroom where she already felt stretched too thin. What these changes had in common for these three teachers was that they were outside of the teacher's control, yet they had a large impact on each teacher's daily experiences.

"There's a lot to be said for just having a say in the parameters of your year," Serena reflected. "For me, as I'm deciding whether or not to stay in teaching, it would make a huge difference if going forward I could say things like: 'I need an afternoon prep

this semester to attend appointments with my sick child,' and for that to be met with: 'sure, we understand.' Or, if I could not be thrown into a new course without my say so. But it seems there's an expectation that teachers will do whatever they're told, and the impact on me, not on the school, but on me individually, is huge."

"That makes sense," Carlos agreed, "what you're saying is that you'd like to be able to control those aspects of your job that affect your ability to do your job and to live your life in a healthy way."

"And with a positive attitude," Serena added. "What I see though is that it is only getting worse, class sizes continue to increase, funding decreases — you never know what next year will bring."

**Compromising choices.** The worry about what next year will bring left Mara, Carlos, and Serena feeling compromised. "That's how I'm feeling this year especially," Mara explained, "because of the new administrator, I feel like my seniority, both in the district and at the school, doesn't really mean anything. I'm worried about taking a leave next year and not getting my classroom back when I return. And I just think, after so many years, to still feel that next fall is uncertain, it's really hard, because it means I can never really have control, not over any kind of balance, or over life in general, and during my leave last year I realized I'm really protective of not letting things get out-of-whack again."

"Yes, I can see how it would be better if we could choose our compromises," Carlos offered, "because the courses you have this year, Serena, for another teacher might be ideal. Or there might be some years when a teacher might really welcome the challenge of a new course, when in another year, if there was something going on at

home for that teacher, a new course would be the wrong kind of challenge and would throw things too far 'out-of-whack.' And, if you can choose your compromises, you get the impression that you will be able to choose future compromises, but as soon as you have a compromise thrown at you, you get the feeling that nothing is secure, and you feel *compromised*."

"Yes, you feel really vulnerable," Mara joined, "and devalued in a way, like no one must be noticing the job you're doing."

"And that erodes your confidence, and then your commitment to doing your best," Serena finished.

By linking the experience of facing unpredictability and instability in the teaching life to their individual feelings of commitment and confidence, Carlos, Serena, and Mara were beginning to explore how their experiences impacted their ability to compose their own stories to stay by. Webster and Baylis (2000) identify "compromise" as directly linked to one's sense of self. While in one sense of the word, compromise might be seen as occurring when two or more parties reach a kind of middle ground, in another sense, compromise can require "a shift in fundamental values or commitment," a betrayal of "one's moral identity – who one is (or wants to be), and what one stands for," this is "the experience of 'being compromised'" (p. 222). For Serena, Mara, and Carlos the impact of the decisions made by others was not only on the parameters of their day-to-day experiences, but also on their sense of who they were able to *be* as teachers. Carlos acknowledged the danger that decisions made not to break may be made from this emotional space – of vulnerability, of feeling compromised, or even of anger – and may therefore be made in the spirit of fighting back or rallying against imposed parameters.

Choices might also be made from the desire to sustain self or practice, in that spirit of "enduring without failing or yielding" (*Sustain*, online etymology dictionary), that is, from the desire to preserve moral integrity or identity in some way. As Mara, Serena, and Carlos described decisions made not to break though, they often described yet another level of uncomfortable compromise.

For Mara, as her energy was diverted towards new policies and an increasingly diverse group of students, she made other decisions that were, for her, about reclaiming spaces to replenish her energy and nourish herself. "Basically, I don't attend professional development days any more," she explained, "I know they will only offer me yet more things I won't ever have the time to implement. So, instead I catch up on planning, marking or report cards, or sometimes, if I'm really tired, I just rest."

"You have to do something to keep your stress levels down," Serena responded. "For me right now, with 36 students in some of my classes and no prep time, I find I'm not willing to, as you said Carlos, to break myself over it. I mean, I really only mark one piece of each type of writing assignment per class each term, even that is already three papers per class. And the amount of completion marks I give has gone way up. But at least I am able to *be nice* to the students. I'm not stressing myself out to the point where I am short-tempered with them or have completely lost my patience."

"Right," Carlos agreed, "because our ability to be calm or happy or at least not stressed out has a huge impact on our relationships with students, which is a huge part of the job."

"Still though, it's not a great place to be in," Serena reflected. "You want to take pride in your work. Last year I had a new course thrown at me, and it was one I had zero

interest or ability in. I knew I would do an okay job, but not a great one. It really didn't feel good, no one wants to go in front of a group of students and seem apathetic or uncaring."

"This is exactly what I'm worried about with this English course," Carlos replied. "And it's almost worse guilt-wise, because I do have a background in English teaching, which means I know what it would take to do the course well, and I have the skills to do the course well, if I was willing to reach for them."

**Choices that linger.** When we met again in the fall after breaking for summer, Carlos had been living his choice not to break over his single English course for over a month, and this represented an ongoing challenge.

"Usually I know the purpose behind each assignment and how it will build into the next one," he explained. "But having borrowed assignments from other teachers, I'm just kind of handing them out and hoping for the best." Though Carlos still understood and believed in his reasons for making the choice not to engage in elaborate planning for a single course, he also described the challenges in knowing he was compromising his usual teaching priorities. His students were a daily reminder that he could be doing more for them. His comment that "now he just needed to be okay with his decision," told of a process that would be ongoing for the semester or longer, not one completed in a moment.

"Do you feel your life is in balance, Carlos?" Mara asked.

"Yes! That's a big part of it!" Carlos declared. "I could do my job forever balanced exactly how it is now, and do it well. For me that means keeping up with my creative projects outside of school, and it means focusing on those parts of my job that I

find professionally satisfying, or that challenge me to grow as a professional in the right ways. I don't mind, for example, staying until 7:00 at night to work on our next theatre production, that's part of what I really like about my job. That also means I'm not willing to spend that time in the English classroom instead, doing the kind of planning I know I would need to do in order to be a 'good' English teacher."

"See, and given better circumstances," Serena added, "I would want to spend more time working on writing with the students. That is a part of the job that I love and am skilled at, but with this many students and no preps, I'm just really not able to do more. And I know, just as anyone who is not a teacher would understand, that getting feedback on your writing only a handful of times over your entire set of high school English classes, is probably going to have a negative impact on student learning. I feel guilty about that, and I also hate that I feel guilty."

In this small group, Mara, Serena, and Carlos were able to respond with empathy instead of judgment to the choices each was making to remain sustained. Many teachers might also respond with empathy to Mara's choices, for example, and would likely understand her disillusionment with professional development, with new initiatives, and with inconsistent levels of support from administration. Yet in her day-to-day experiences, there is little opportunity for her to share and reflect on the stories to stay by she is living. Instead, she calls in sick or finds other, more acceptable cover stories to explain how she is spending her professional development time. Nor do these teachers have a venue to discuss the feelings of guilt that accompany their decisions, feelings that become a large part of their stories to stay by. Some literature links teachers' experiences of guilt to perfectionism or unrealistically high self expectations (Hargreaves, 1994; Nias,

1997), particularly among beginning teachers who may not as of yet developed the skills to enact the high expectations they have set. As experienced teachers though, Serena, Carlos, and Mara faced a different dilemma, one of having proven abilities and well-developed pedagogical skills that they were not putting into action. As Serena described her inability to engage more with student writing, she also described her knowledge that this was impacting student learning in a negative way. She experienced a kind of *moral distress* as a result, which Webster and Baylis (2000) define as an "incoherence between one's beliefs and one's actions" (p. 218). Serena's comment that she hates that she feels guilty about her choices indicates that she understands her options are limited, but the comment also indicates that these choices continue to impact her.

Webster and Baylis (2000) describe this continuing effect as *moral residue*: "that which each of us carries with us from those times in our lives when in the face of moral distress we have seriously compromised ourselves or allowed ourselves to be compromised" (p. 218). They further describe a compromised sense of identity as being the cause of this lingering. Experiences of moral distress and residue are "painful because they threaten or sometimes betray deeply held and cherished beliefs and values" (p. 218).

"Are there parts of being back in the English classroom you're enjoying?" I asked Carlos, knowing that he once did enjoy the English classroom, even if he was feeling tension being back there now.

"Of course," Carlos answered as his body language noticeably softened. "I'm still present and engaged with the students, they're a really nice group of kids. And I've had time to work with them one-on-one when they need it and that kind of stuff." Carlos could readily share stories of his growing relationships with students. For example, he

shared the satisfying journey of building an easy rapport with a student who first entered his classroom determined to remain disengaged.

"See, you're doing better than you think," Mara noted.

"It's funny," Serena mused, "if you would have asked me last year, with those big classes and no preps, I would have said that was some of my worst teaching to date." At the end of the previous school year, as Carlos was learning of the change in his fall assignment, Serena was resigning from her district as a result of her experiences. In September, as she was beginning a graduate program, she received an offer from a different district to work in a school near her home. She began teaching in this new setting in addition to pursuing her graduate courses. "But actually, I spoke to my former principal recently, and he told me how much the school missed me, how valued I was, and offered me a promotion if I ever wanted to return." While Serena did take this as the compliment it was intended to be, there was also a lingering incongruence, a disconnect between the praise, and all those things she knew she was choosing not to do at the time.

Mara, who did pursue a year leave, found herself subbing as she decided how to spend the time ahead. This substitute work provided her an opportunity to learn that maybe she was doing a 'good' job. "Now that I have been in other people's classrooms," she shared, "I see I wasn't doing too badly." She sees the choices other teaches are making and feels that she was still a good teacher, despite it all.

**Discussion**

Given that every individual teacher has limited amounts of time, energy, and other resources, we might imagine that many teachers might be in the process of first making, and then living out and living with choices made not to break like those described by

Carlos, Mara, and Serena. Yet, the details and residuals of these decisions are not part of the dominant discussions around teacher experience; rather these choices are of the "more private aspects of pedagogy" that include "coping with competing definitions of success and failure, and one's own sense of vulnerability and credibility" (Britzman, 2003, p. 28). Some definitions of success are rooted in the ideal teacher in mind, the 'good' teacher rooted in more stereotypical understandings of teachers. 'Good' teachers are those who "'really' care about their students and are willing to do right by them at great personal cost" (Dalton, 2004, p. 39), they are self-sacrificing. Yet, the choices made by teachers in this study were often made in efforts to sustain, rather than sacrifice, self. In practice, the goal of maintaining or sustaining one's self or teaching practiced in the face of instability was described by Mara, Carlos, and Serena as a competing definition of success. Choices made not to break were often made with larger goals in mind. Carlos, Serena, and Mara each understood the potential negative influence high stress levels could have on their relationships with students. Therefore, sometimes decisions were made that prioritized their ability to engage with the students in positive ways; their decisions were made in support of quality relationships, even if those decisions also meant not fully putting into practice the complete range of pedagogical knowledge and skills they have to offer.

The daily choices of these teachers at times reflected a desire to preserve integrity and identity, to live out a story to stay by that reflected their individual beliefs about what a good teacher is and does. While for Serena and for Mara this search had been more constant, for Carlos, this search became more pronounced when his streak of stability was broken by a new teaching assignment. For all three of these teachers, daily decisions were about prioritizing in their lives as a whole, as well as within the work day/semester/year.

At times, these smaller choices, to not attend professional development, to limit time spent marking, or to limit time spent planning, were the only decisions they were able to make in contexts in which they had very little control.

These decisions, made both proactively and reluctantly, must be made continuously and become a significant part of the larger teaching experience. They can also leave considerable residue. Though Serena, Mara, and Carlos could each share positive experiences from those times when they were also left feeling guilty or morally distressed about the choices they were making, the latter emotions seemed at times to overshadow the former. To return to Dewey's description of the emotional colouring of a single experience, we might also wonder: if an experience is coloured by strong, self-conscious, and secret emotions, like moral distress or guilt, can teachers make space in that experience to also celebrate their successes? Can they recognize the "success" of sustaining their professional capacities, if that success is also perceived to be at the expense of some of their core teacher values, or worse, at the expense of student learning? Johnson and Birkeland (2003) articulate how important it is for beginning teachers to "feel successful" if they are to remain in the profession. The experiences of the teachers in this study suggest that the ability to feel successful, to feel as though you are practicing at a level reflective of your potential and capability, is no less important as a teacher's career continues.

**For Teacher Education**

The work of teaching is open-ended in nature, and in a very real way, is never done (Farouk, 2012; Hargreaves, 1994). Given the equally real limitations of time and individual capacities, it is inevitable that teachers must make some daily decisions about

how to spend their limited resources. What is not inevitable is the way in which we first prepare, and then continue to support teachers as they negotiate their stories to stay by. The ability to share and listen to each other's stories has the potential to create more spaces, and more productive spaces, for dialogue around some of the more hidden struggles of teachers, both in preservice and ongoing teacher education.

In preservice education, stories from teachers who are negotiating their balance in an ongoing way may help to disrupt some of the already entrenched notions of "good" teachers novice teachers hold. The stories of teachers explored in teacher education programs need to move beyond Hollywood narratives to the stories of "good teachers with all their human fallibility in place" (Fawaz, 2009, para. 54). Teachers must be truly *seen* as "whole persons who relate to children and interact with them, rather than as emotionally detached professionals" (Farouk, 2012, p. 491). The image of stability within the teaching profession must also be disrupted, and replaced perhaps with stories that share the ebb and flow of teacher experience and identity over the course of a career.

Yet, if preservice and beginning teachers are to hear these stories, we must first create spaces in which those stories can be freely shared. Ongoing teacher education spaces where teachers can see themselves not as "good" or "bad" teachers, but instead as "always in the process of 'becoming' … [teachers] need to continually rediscover who they are and what they stand for through their dialogue and collaboration with peers" (Nieto, 2003, p. 395). These spaces are those where cover stories can be shed, spaces where teachers are whole people with whole lives that include, but are not limited to, their teacher selves. Hargreaves (1994) describes these spaces as "communities of colleagues … [bringing] together the professional and the personal lives of teachers in a

way that supports growth and allows problems to be discussed without fear of disapproval or punishment" (p. 156). These spaces are free of judgment and full instead of curiosity, wonder, and support. They are places rich with a "tentative knowing" that "embraces a multiplicity of perspectives over time and place, preserving a sense that the story could be told otherwise" (Huber et al., 2013, p. 223).

These spaces might also be research spaces, like the dinner conversations over which this research unfolded. If shared as part of research, with the idea that they be retold, then these more candid and complex stories of teachers also have advocacy potential. Serena for example, expressed her wish for people to know that it is possible for a student to receive feedback on a limited number of pieces of writing over the course of their entire high school career. "I think anyone could understand that this situation is less than ideal," she reflects. What is needed now is to be more open about the difficulties teachers are facing, so that teachers and students might be supported in effective ways.

**Chapter 5**

**Experiences of Residue: What Teaching Leaves Behind**

*Residue* denotes simply *that which is left behind* (*Residue*, online etymology dictionary). Yet, in the context of this narrative inquiry into the experiences of teachers who stay in teaching, *residue* has gained layers of meaning. First there is that which is left behind for teachers at the end of each "heavy hour," (Beck, in progress) each day, semester, and school year. There is also that which is sometimes left behind in the teaching profession as a whole. Amidst endless discussions about the profession of teaching — its standards, the delivery of content, accountability, etc. — there is a noticeable absence. There is just not the same focus on teachers themselves; on "the person of the teacher" (Kelchtermans, 2013, p. 381) and what they need in order to sustain their "stories to live by" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4) or their identity in teaching. I am often reminded of this when I share my research topic with others. Recently, after explaining my research focus to a new acquaintance, a focus on how teachers who stay in teaching manage those times when they find they cannot be the teacher they have in mind, she replied how in her own work, she offers teachers the tools needed to recognize particular kinds of mental health issues. I became excited, as one insight I have gained is that there is an important piece missing in the professional skill-set of teachers, and that self-care is part of that piece. Yet as I began asking her questions about her work, I felt my enthusiasm fade as I realized we were talking about two different things. She offers teachers the skills to recognize and intervene in the mental health struggles of students, not to recognize those they might face themselves. As Bullough (2008) notes, "there appears to be an exclusive focus among policymakers on

increasing student learning … to the neglect of teacher well being" (p. 22). When speaking about my work I find this exclusive focus, on what teachers should or could be doing better for their students and not for themselves, seems to eclipse the possibility that the teacher might be the centre of someone's research or concern. I wonder how to shift this conversation and make "clear the ineluctable connection between [teachers'] well-being and the well-being of children" (Bullough, 2008, p. 23). Part of what my research seeks to explore is: What should the rest of us (yes, all of us) know, understand, and/or do to better support teachers as whole people who relate to students on a day-to-day basis?

Over the course of the conversations I shared with Mara, Carlos, and Serena,[13] we returned often to two topics that represented significant aspects of their teaching experiences: choices made not to break, (Beck, in progress) and heavy hours (Beck, in progress).[14] As a group, the four of us developed these concepts over the course of our monthly research conversations. As I wrote what became two separate papers, each exploring one of these themes, I came to understand that they had something in common. The experience of making choices not to break, and experiencing the heavy hours of teaching, are both experiences that leave something behind. I began to refer to this something as "residue." This paper is unique from those other two because, while we did occasionally speak about residue as a group, some of the core understandings I will share here come more from my own reflections after our conversations and from my subsequent searches in the literature. During these searches, I was intrigued to find that the term residue has also been explored in the health sciences (Lützén, Cronqvist, Magnusson, & Andersson, 2003; Webster & Baylis, 2000). I also found important

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[13] "Carlos," "Mara," and "Serena" are the self-selected pseudonyms of the three teachers who participated in this inquiry, which is described in greater detail below.
[14] These two concepts will be more fully explained below.

connections between the understanding of residue I was forming based on our research conversations, and key concerns from the field of counseling psychology related to the emotional hazards for caring professionals (Newell & MacNeil, 2010; Sommer, 2008). After sharing the ways in which residue accumulated in Carlos, Serena, and Mara's experiences of choosing not to break and heavy hours, this paper will also explore the qualities and impacts of this residue as the teachers in this study experienced it, and as the connecting literature describes it. Finally, this paper offers an initial discussion of how understanding these processes might change the ways we talk about the work of teaching and the ways we support teachers.

**Framing the Inquiry: Stories to Stay by**

I began this inquiry with a wonder about teachers who stay in teaching. During previous research exploring early career attrition (Beck, 2010), I became intrigued by the assumption that some teachers who stay "develop as reflective professionals" while for others, "early coping mechanisms morph into their teaching practices, resulting, at best, in strongly disciplined, but pedagogically and relationally impoverished classrooms" (Anderson, 2009, p. 93). Having left my own K-12 teaching position early, I wondered if what awaited me had I stayed was really only one outcome or the other. I felt compelled to explore the space between simply surviving and truly thriving in teaching, and to explore the ways in which that space might change over time. How do teachers who stay negotiate the myriad of competing demands made on them with the limited amounts of energy and resources they have to offer? How do teachers who stay story those times, be they moments or months, when they cannot be the teacher they have in mind?

A Deweyan understanding of experience frames this inquiry and is key to

understanding the experiences of teachers over time as they continue to teach. Dewey described experience itself as continuous – "one part carries on what went before" (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 38). In other words, each experience leaves a residue that continues into the next, accumulating in different ways and across contexts. This reframes any teaching experience that might be seen as singular, such as leaving or staying in teaching, or perhaps even surviving or thriving, as not "a thing happening at that moment, but an expression of something happening over time" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 29).

Dewey's philosophy of experience (Dewey, 1934/2005, 1938/1997) is described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as a constant "conceptual, imaginative backdrop" (p. 2) to narrative inquiry, the selected methodology for this study. Dewey's philosophy directly shapes the three-dimensional inquiry space: "the personal and social (interaction); past, present, and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation)" (p. 50). From this view, experience is storied, continuous, and is constructed through the "confluence of social influences on a person's inner life, social influences on their environment, and their unique personal history" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 41). Dewey (1934/2005) also characterized experience as having an inherently emotional quality. He described this emotional quality of experience as the very part of *an experience* (singular) that separates it from the whole of *experience* making up our lives. Dewey draws attention to emotions as complex and evolving, as also needing to be understood continuously. Often occupying a "marginal role" in teacher education research (Uitto, Jokikokko, & Estola, 2015), teacher emotion can be a neglected aspect of both teaching practice (Hargreaves, 2000) and of leadership practice (Leithwood &

Beatty, 2007).

Within this Deweyan understanding of experience, as continuous, transactional, and emotion-full, is an entwined understanding of identity, or of "stories to live by," a way of thinking about identity that highlights its inter-connectedness with knowledge and context (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4). Identity in this view is seen not as an end-point, but as continuously in motion. It is "an ongoing and dynamic process which entails the making sense and (re)interpretation of one's own values and experiences" (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 220). Identity formation occurs always in context, in interaction, as "we respond to the space available by accepting, rejecting, or negotiating [our] role through the way we position ourselves in the space or shape the space to reflect our identity" (Pinnegar, 2005, p. 260). This view of teacher identity – as complex, nuanced, and ever evolving – is often at odds with more dominant, stereotypical understandings of teachers and teaching. Britzman (2003) describes how persistent stereotypes of teachers – such as the image of the "good" teacher as "self-sacrificing, kind, overworked, underpaid, and holding an unlimited reservoir of patience" (p. 28) – serve to "engender a static and hence repressed notion of identity as something already out there, a stability that can be assumed" (p. 29). For teachers then, there can be a considerable distance between the fixed ideal of the teacher in mind, informed by these stereotypes and by the "apprenticeship of observation" first described by Lortie (1975), and the lived and ever-evolving experience of teaching. In my inquiry into the experiences of teachers who left teaching early, the space between the ideal teacher in mind and lived stories was an area of tension, and of confusing and overwhelming emotions (Beck, 2010). Spaces like these might be navigated at times by the creation of "cover stories," defined by Clandinin and

Connelly (1996) as those stories that "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. 25, my emphasis). Stories to leave by, or "the stories teachers begin to tell themselves when they can no longer live out their personal practical knowledge in their stories to live by" (Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009, p. 146) are often cover stories. The cover stories do not tell of struggles teachers face in school contexts, but are acceptable stories of leaving, stories such as leaving for graduate school, or parenthood, or a better paying job (Clandinin et al., 2009). These cover stories, while allowing individual teachers to keep their good teacher identity intact, leave much of their experience hidden from view. I wondered what was hidden from view in teachers' *stories to stay by*, and sought to create a research space where I could more deeply attend those stories alongside teachers.

**Entering the Inquiry: Collaborative Exploration**

Teachers in their seventh to tenth year of teaching were invited to join this inquiry to "collaboratively explore their teacher stories" with a small group of peers over monthly dinners. Our meetings spanned one calendar year and two school years, occurring in March, April, May, and June of one school year, and in October and November of the next. Each lasting for two hours, our conversations were sometimes gently structured with a question, prompt, or activity, while other conversations were unstructured. Whether or not I offered structure depended on my reflections on the meeting prior, or on what I felt might be most conducive to deepening our conversations. More than once my

intentions shifted after arriving and hearing what my research friends[15] had on their minds. Most importantly, I worked to create a space where teachers could shed their cover stories, engage in dialogue with responsive colleagues, and be nourished by a healthy meal and rich conversation.

I recorded the audio of our conversations and kept artifacts we occasionally created such as a collage during our first meeting and annals (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of our teaching experiences during our last meeting. I also collected the one-on-one and group emails we exchanged. As I had a long drive to our meetings, I spent a great deal of time listening to the audio recordings of our research conversations. These listenings reminded me not just of the words we shared, but also of the non-verbal and/or ambient moments in our discussions. Wanting to keep these memories fresh during the writing process, I continued to listen to the recordings – making notes, sometimes pausing to write narrative or analytical pieces – throughout the recursive analysis and writing process.

One great advantage of this research process was the pedagogical space this narrative inquiry created (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013). Since none of us shared grade levels, subject areas, or school districts, we quickly sought out the deeper commonalities of the teaching experience. Carlos, Mara, and Serena each added a unique perspective to these collective explorations; perspectives they felt were not often shared

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[15] Originally, teachers were invited into this inquiry as "collaborators" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Finley, 2005), reflective of the collaborative nature of the conversations, the transactional ontology upon which the inquiry is framed, and the importance of relationality in narrative inquiry. "Research friends" later emerged as a term by which we could more easily address each other, both to each other and to outsiders. When meeting by chance one day in public for example, Serena introduced me as her "research friend" and I could do the same.

in such candid ways among teachers. At times, Serena, Carlos, and Mara expressed a wish that some of what we were articulating would make its way into education related conversations beyond our own. I offer this discussion of the residue of teaching with that goal in mind, and with the hope that it will generate more discussions on these important, but sometimes left behind aspects of teaching experiences.

**Residue: How it Accumulates**

To some degree, the experiences of teaching will always linger. As Serena explained, even "marking on a Saturday, I'm thinking of all those kids and the stories stay with me: thoughts of their academic success, etc. And marking, that's just normal teaching."[16] Despite the kind of lingering inherent in a relational profession, I began to wonder about the kind of residue that accumulates after choices made not to break, and after experiencing particularly heavy hours. While they may be a regular part of teaching, these experiences seemed to have the potential to move beyond "normal" teaching and become experiences that threatened a teacher's ability to sustain their practice or their stories to live by.

**The residue of choosing not to break.** During our research conversations, we came to use the phrase "choosing not to break" to describe the negotiations teachers make in their day-to-day lives in order to *sustain* themselves or their teaching practice in some way. *Sustain* here is more than staying in teaching, it is the ability to support or maintain one's identity in teaching, one's stories to live by. Etymologically, *sustain* evokes ideas

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[16] These quotes, from the research conversations Mara, Carlos, Serena and I shared, are for the most part verbatim. They are small pieces of the many conversations we had over the course of the year, and in some cases they have been edited for cohesion and clarity within the context of this paper. Carlos, Serena, and Mara also had a chance to offer input into this paper so I could ensure their experiences were reflected in ways that felt true for them, and to be sure I had not overlooked anything they deemed to be critical to their understanding of residue.

of "holding up," of "enduring without failing or yielding" (*Sustain*, online etymology dictionary), without yielding those parts of practice key to identity, or without failing in critical areas of self-care. As we explored the choices Carlos, Mara, and Serena each made not to break, these choices began to emerge as: necessary because of frequently changing and imposed factors having a significant impact on their individual teaching circumstances; as requiring further compromise, after this initial experience of feeling *compromised*; and as *continuing*, as leaving a residue that must then itself be negotiated.

Kelchtermans (2013) asserts that vulnerability is "a structural characteristic" of teaching in part because "teachers' working conditions are to a large extent imposed on them" (p. 391). These conditions are not only imposed, but are also constantly changing, resulting in what, for Serena, Mara, and Carlos, was a surprising instability requiring frequent negotiations. Serena for example, in the face of a heavy course load that included large class sizes, chose not to break, but instead to grade only one piece of each type of required writing assignment per class. Compromises like this allowed her to "be nice" to her students, to be present with them and avoid being short-tempered or losing patience, but she was neglecting a piece of her teaching important to her – encouraging students in their writing. In short, she felt she had to compromise, after feeling *compromised* by the large class sizes and heavy course load. Webster and Baylis (2000) identify "compromise" as directly linked to one's sense of self, as a betrayal of "one's moral identity – who one is (or wants to be), and what one stands for" (p. 222). For Mara, Serena, and Carlos the impact of the decisions made by others was not only on the parameters of their day-to-day experiences, but also on their stories to stay by. While the further compromises they made allowed them to remain sustained, those compromises,

with their resulting feelings of guilt, failure, or the accompanying sense of incoherence between their teaching ideals and practice, lingered. After making the choice not to break, there was a process of being "okay with that decision," as Carlos described it, a process that was ongoing for a semester or longer, not one completed in a moment. On a day-to-day basis as these teachers worked with students, they were reminded that they could be doing more for them, but had made a different choice.

**The residue of heavy hours.** Serena, Carlos, Mara, and I began an exploration of teaching's "heavy hours" with a wonder about why adding one more class to a teacher's day, a change happening in the districts where Serena and Carlos each worked, represented such a significant change for teachers. During this exploration, we felt the lack of a concept describing the ways in which teachers experience contact hours, and the ways in which the weight of those hours is increasing. After coining the phrase "heavy hour," we developed several key understandings that describe heavy hours in their experiences of them. The most salient aspects of heavy hours for Carlos, Mara, and Serena included: rapid professional decision-making in the midst of complexity; the reality of being pulled in multiple directions, too many to turn to in an hour; and the residue that lingers long after the hour is over.

Carlos identified the professional decision-making required while managing the complexities of the classroom environment as one of the key differences between a heavy hour and any other hour of his workday. Even decisions appearing simple, such as granting permission for washroom breaks, require that teachers consider and weigh several competing factors; if for example, the bathroom break would help or hinder the student or class's curricular work, or perhaps offer a needed "break" of another kind.

Factors such as an increase in class-size or class complexity serve to make a heavy hour of professional-decision making heavier. While these factors are often associated with more work before or after class (more photocopying or marking for example), when linked to those experiences related to professional decision-making within the heavy hour, more students means more decisions, and it means each decision is more complex. Likewise, factors often associated with teacher workload, such as curricular changes and accountability measures, also increase the complexity of the heavy hour as they serve to constrict the professional space teachers have in which to use their own professional judgment (Biesta, 2015; Brante, 2009).

While constrictions come from organizations in the form of accountability and while class-size increases and class composition becomes more complex, teachers become pulled in an excess of directions, and some things get left undone in those heavy hours. In Mara's practice for instance, this meant that some of her grade 2 students went without the individual support she knew they needed while she prioritized the management of the class as a whole. Despite knowing and feeling the professional obligation teachers have to offer the needed support, the context of the heavy hour, which included a difficult class composition and no support from aides, did not offer Mara the space to do so. This left her feeling that she was not really "teaching," but instead, just "passing time" in the classroom. For Serena, hours that were too heavy meant it was not always possible to address arising social issues in her large high school classes. In one instance, this meant not intervening when she had concerns that student social plans might lead to a date-rape situation for one of her students. In the moment, she was simply too over-burdened to attend to what she was overhearing in a way that was appropriate.

She felt it would not be appropriate for example, to intervene in front of other students, or to intervene with only a brief comment as she moved around the classroom, nor was asking for counseling support an option as the counselor positions in the school had been reduced. Instead the moment passed in an instant, and at the end of the hour Serena was left with the residue of the inability to attend. For teachers experiencing particularly heavy hours, those things left undone can leave a residue more challenging to process than the routine reflection of teaching: they can leave regret and guilt about not being able to meet student need, and a kind of *moral distress* (Webster & Baylis, 2000) that begs existential questions about who teachers are, not just as professionals, but also as people.

**Residue: Its Qualities and Effects**

*Moral distress* and the related concept of *moral residue* have been given a fairly wide treatment in health sciences literature related to nursing and to health ethics. The foundational definition for moral distress is "when one is aware of the right course of action but is unable to act in the correct moral way" (Schluter, Winch, Holzhauser, & Henderson, 2008, p. 305). Lützén and colleagues (2003) describe how those in the nursing profession become vulnerable to moral distress when they feel "they must take short-cuts or leave things undone because the work situation makes it impossible to do otherwise," much like teachers navigating a heavy hour or responding to frequently changing teaching conditions, nurses may understand certain things are beyond their control, yet they still "feel a (personal) responsibility for the care that they were not able to provide" (p. 313). Morally distressing events leave behind a "moral residue," defined as:

that which each of us carries with us from those times in our lives when

in the face of moral distress we have seriously compromised ourselves or

allowed ourselves to be compromised. These times are usually very

painful because they threaten or sometimes betray deeply held and

cherished beliefs and values. (Webster & Baylis, 2000, p. 218)

For Webster and Baylis, this residue is "lasting and powerfully concentrated in our

thoughts; hence the term *residue*" (p. 218).

Moral distress and residue have a long list of associated symptoms. According to

Ulrich and colleagues (2007), moral distress has lasting "emotional, physical and

psychosocial consequences" that include "frustration, interpersonal conflict,

dissatisfaction, physical illness, and possibly abandonment of the profession" (p. 1709).

Some additional effects revealed in a review of the literature by Schluter and colleagues

(2008) include physical symptoms such as: headaches, neck pain, muscle aches, and

stomach troubles; emotional manifestations such as: feelings of anger, guilt, disgust,

sadness, discouragement, and loss of self-worth; and psychological manifestations such

as: being unable to "switch-off," not wanting to return to work, and questioning the

purpose of the care they provide (summarized from p. 316). Schluter and colleagues also

note that the literature significantly links moral distress and the "experience of emotional

exhaustion and burnout" (p. 317).

Burnout is a psychological syndrome characterized by "overwhelming exhaustion,

feelings of cynicism and detachment … and a sense of ineffectiveness" (Maslach, 2006,

p. 38). Unfortunately, the term burnout often carries negative connotations in Education

settings and is often more associated with negative stereotypes of teachers than with real

and often confusing health concerns. While "good" teachers are idealized as teachers who "'really care' about their students and are willing to do right by them at great personal cost" (Dalton, 2004, p. 39), cynicism and detachment are characteristics often associated with "bad" teachers. Burnout is portrayed as a final destination that those who care enough can avoid, while failure to avoid burnout implies an internalized failure for teachers, the feeling that "there is something wrong with the individual" (Schaefer, 2013, p. 265). For teachers learning to teach, or even for teachers as they continue to teach, the conflation of "good" teaching with notions of risk and self-sacrifice is essentially a recipe for emotional exhaustion. Once teachers find they are experiencing symptoms of burnout, the feelings of failure or the fear of being a "bad" teacher is enough for them to keep these feelings to themselves, instead of reaching for the support they need. A more nuanced picture of how experiences and their residue contribute over time to experiences of exhaustion or burnout are needed in order to counter these dominant and simplistic narratives.

A review of the psychology literature completed by Newell and MacNeil (2010) reveals a more nuanced understanding not only of burnout, but also of compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and secondary traumatic stress, which are all considered to be work-related hazards for helping professionals. Reinforcing the need to understand teacher experiences over time is the identification of burnout and compassion fatigue as progressive states that occur cumulatively over time. The experience of "burning out" includes: experiencing a depletion of emotional resources due to chronic demands from "clients, supervisors, and organizations;" feelings of depersonalization or cynicism; and a reduced sense of accomplishment (p. 59). Behaviours and feelings associated with the

experience of burnout include: "frequent absenteeism, chronic tardiness, chronic fatigue, evidence of poor client care, and low completion rates of clinical and administrative duties" (p. 59). Organizational factors that play a contributing role in professional burnout include: "excessively high caseloads, lack of control or influence over agency policies and procedures, unfairness in organization structure and discipline, low peer and supervisory support, and poor agency and on-the-job training" (p. 59). Compassion fatigue is a term describing "the overall experience of emotional and physical fatigue" due to the "chronic use of empathy" combined with "day-to-day bureaucratic hurdles" (p. 61). Symptoms of compassion fatigue include some combination of burnout symptoms and symptoms associated with secondary traumatic stress, which mirror post-traumatic stress related symptoms and include: "intrusive thoughts, traumatic memories or nightmares… insomnia, chronic irritability or angry outbursts, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, avoidance of clients and client situations, and hypervigilant or startle reactions toward stimuli" (p. 60). Individual practitioners will respond to difficult experiences differently (Sommer, 2008), so no two people will experience the exact same symptoms to the same degree.

While reading these discussions of moral distress, moral residue, burnout, and compassion fatigue, I noticed a reflection of some of the experiences of Mara, Carlos, and Serena, even if during our research conversations we were lacking these more clinical terms and descriptions. For Carlos for example, the residue of choosing not to break over an anomalous course left him with a general unease that was noticeable to the rest of us during our October meeting. Later, after reflecting on this experience, Carlos noted that the difficult part of choosing not to break was the difficulty of reconciling that choice

with his "good teacher" identity. Meanwhile Serena described how adding another heavy hour to her day was challenging because of what she described as "spillover" or "evening psychic time," that is, those thoughts and feelings that followed her home each day. Serena also described the ways in which she felt her energy depleting over time, an experience echoed by Mara who described feeling as though teaching had aged her "exponentially," and had left her with more health issues than she would have had otherwise. For example, Mara knew that the weekend after parent-teacher interviews, which required her to engage in heavy hours all day and evening on both Thursday and Friday, would be one spent in recovery as she predictably falls ill after those long days. Mara, in addition to her description of feeling as though she is just "passing time" in the classroom, also felt as though her ability to be a nurturing person had diminished over time, and that she sometimes found herself operating in "survival mode." Eventually, the accumulation of illness and feelings of decreased satisfaction resulted in Mara taking two non-successive leaves, one 12-week medical leave, and one year-long personal leave.

Without these clinical and more nuanced ways to talk about the residue of teaching, we found other ways to speak about the kinds of stressors teachers experience. For example, we spoke about that iconic image of teacher stress, the never-ending stack of paperwork. Mara described how there is "always so much paper everywhere," and how she could "never keep up. There's always a pile of paper on my desk at school," she explained, "and a pile of paper on my dining room table at home." At the time, this image of paper passed me by unexamined – it was so familiar to me. I could remember, from my own K-12 teaching experience, the literal weight of that stack of paper as I carried it from school to the car to the house and back again each day. I also remembered the

figurative weight of its constant presence, one that even became the center of a recurring teaching dream. As I thought more deeply though about the conversations I shared with these teachers, as I re-listened to our words with wonders about *residue* in mind, I began to understand that the stack of paperwork is one of the ways, and one of the safer ways, that teachers currently have to talk about that which is left behind. That stack of paper is residue made tactile, and if we probe more deeply into this stack of paperwork, there is much to be learned about the experiences of teachers in schools. Even the differences in how these individual teachers related to their stacks of paper revealed something about their relationship to residue.

"I've always had the skill," Carlos described, "to go home. I have noticed that in some ways, hard workers get their butts kicked in the school system. That feeling that you need to get everything done is killer. But I've always gone home at a reasonable time, unless I'm there for rehearsal or something. And if the paperwork didn't get done, it just didn't."

"I feel like that's an important skill for teachers to have," Serena commented, "and a challenging one to develop. I remember a lot of fear mongering in the system about not getting a contract if you don't do this or that thing. And paperwork is something tied up in that message. You don't want to be seen leaving the building early. The longer I teach though," she reflected, "the more I realize how important some time away might be, just for being a good professional of any sort."

Carlos, Serena, and Mara each acknowledged that these skills, those required to effectively manage the residue of teaching, were key to thriving. But in their day-to-day experiences they had not been given any detailed guidance on exactly what that might

look like. These marginalized stories were covered over, and so as they made choices not to break, or found ways to survive hours that were too heavy, they kept their choices and experimenting to themselves. The residue of these experiences was also covered over, revealed in codes of "I always get sick after parent-teacher interviews," or "this paperwork is really never-ending, isn't it?" In response to my wonder about whether or if they had deeper discussions about these experiences with their colleagues, Serena responded that these were "open secrets" – present, but not really discussed.

Without this discussion, teachers have no way of knowing how others meet these situations, or whether or not the ways they choose to sustain themselves are comparable to others. There is little to no open discussion about how these complex experiences shape stories to stay by. We might wonder though, if we return to Dewey's (1934/2005) description of the emotional colouring of a single experience, if an experience is coloured by strong and secret emotions, like moral distress, guilt, or emotional exhaustion, can teachers make space in that experience to also celebrate their successes? Can they recognize the "success" of sustaining their professional capacities, if that success is also perceived to be at the expense of some of their core teacher values, or worse, at the expense of student learning?

## Discussion: Going Forward with Residue in Mind

Despite a setting conducive to deep discussion about issues at the core of teaching practice, it took Mara, Carlos, Serena, and I some time spent inventing or borrowing terms to simply describe certain experiences. After a year, I feel that in some ways we have just begun to explore the residue teaching experiences can leave behind, and the ways in which that residue might accumulate over time. What our year together did

reveal is that stories to stay by are more complex than simple acts of surviving or thriving. There is not necessarily a final or destined teacher identity out there to hold fast to, rather, each teacher's story to stay by is always unfolding, and each experience contributes to the next. Teaching hours will always be heavy; teachers will always have choices to make in regards to how they spend their limited amounts of time and energy; and teaching will always leave residue behind. These are not necessarily "problems" to be permanently "solved," but they do represent a significant part of the practice of educators that needs to be acknowledged and supported. A combination of small changes to our professional culture may have a significant impact for educators. Here I suggest ways in which teachers might approach residue differently, some ways we might change the ways we address these issues in pre-service and in-service teacher education, and some changes that might be made within school environments themselves. Of course, these areas overlap, but are employed here for organizational purposes.

**For teachers.** Teachers require the knowledge and skills needed to be able to recognize for themselves if they are up for a new challenge or if they need to make some sustaining, though difficult choices about how to approach each year. Nias (1997) argues that, in the face of dominant teacher narratives implying that teachers "should 'care' about their pupils in an ever-broadening sense, with the implication that they are morally culpable if they do not" (p. 11), teachers need to learn to be critical about each task they assume in their efforts to demonstrate care for the students in order to avoid over-extending themselves. I would add that teachers need to be encouraged in the belief that professional self-care, or "the utilization of skills and strategies by workers to maintain their own personal, familial, emotional, and spiritual needs while attending to the needs

and demands of their clients" (Newell & MacNeil, 2010, p. 62), is a significant way to care for students. The ability to act within each heavy hour in ways that create educative environments for and with students; to be discerning, patient, kind, and responsive; to be present enough to know when students need encouragement and when they need structure – these are the skills at the heart of teaching, and they do not exist without a flourishing teacher. At a personal level, teachers need to know how significant it is for them to flourish.

In day-to-day living, meeting and processing the residue of teaching might include engagement in a professional community or nurturing significant personal relationships. It should include things like: "maintaining physical health, balanced nutrition, adequate sleep, exercise, or recreation … the use of positive forms of self-expression, such as drawing, painting, sculpting, cooking, or outdoor activities … [or] maintaining spiritual connections through church, meditation, yoga, philanthropic activities, and self-revitalization" (Newell & MacNeil, 2010, p. 62). What might prevent teachers from engaging in these activities, especially during those infamously stressful periods like report-card time, is the belief that "good" teaching is fundamentally about self-sacrifice. Therefore, teachers require new narratives of teachers and teaching, ones that depict complex stories of careers over time.

**For preservice and ongoing teacher education.** To better acknowledge these complex stories, we need to name the challenges teachers experience and provide teachers with education and timely information about the potential outcomes of these experiences. Kelchtermans (2013) asserts that while teacher education often focuses on instrumental concerns related to formal curricular outcomes, the political, moral, and

emotional dimensions of teaching must also be acknowledged. Emotions, he argues, constitute a fundamental aspect of the job and must be "acknowledged as part of educational practices, driven by moral commitment and care for others for whom one feels responsible" (p. 396). Naming some of these emotional and moral experiences might include sharing an understanding of heavy hours, of choices made not to break, and of residue beginning in pre-service teacher education. Burnout might be discussed in deeper ways and alongside other kinds of emotional trauma and reframed as *a process*, something caused not always by flames, but often by slow-smoldering coals lit at any point in a career, and then fed or starved by a multitude of personal and/or professional factors that combine in unique ways over time for each individual. Education professionals must be prepared to be proactive about meeting these experiences and about monitoring their professional well-being. Beyond well-meaning advice to "stay balanced" or "take care of yourself," teachers need some real conversations about what professional self-care looks like and feels like in practice. Deeper conversations about teaching experiences might begin with questions like: "What are you taking home with you each day?" or "How are you sleeping?" or "Here are some of the strategies I have used in the past when I feel overwhelmed by the stack of paperwork."

Continued education about the residue of teaching experiences might include timely reminders in the form of professional development, or even in the form of printed information or dedicated areas of professional association websites, about common teacher stressors and their potential impacts. In addition to descriptions and narratives from teachers about some of the more complex experiences of teaching, this information might also include discussions about restoring professional wellness after a challenging

experience, or once burnout, compassion fatigue, or any other emotional trauma has set in, including realistic time frames for recovery, and how to return to work safely after a leave. Just having this information as part of our professional discourse would be a significant help to teachers like Carlos, Serena, and Mara who were, at first, caught off-guard by the necessity of making choices not to break, and by some of the lingering effects of particularly heavy hours. Literature from the health sciences and from psychology indicates that the best way to support professionals who have the potential to be exposed to emotional trauma, is first to educate, and then to support (Bell & Breslin, 2008; Sommer, 2008).

**Within school settings.** Within or near education settings, teachers need literal, figurative, and temporal *space* in which to engage in professional discussions about their stories to stay by. Kelchtermans (2005) refers to this as a space in which teachers can engage in conversations where the "non-technical dimensions of teaching and being a teacher [are] conceptualized, talked about, shared and critically challenged. Moral dilemmas, emotional experiences and political struggles can find a place there and thus be acknowledged as fundamental to the experience of teaching" (p. 398). Hargreaves (1994) argues that these kinds of professional spaces are needed to "bring together the professional and the personal lives of teachers in a way that supports growth and allows problems to be discussed without fear of disapproval or punishment" (p. 156). Narrative inquiry spaces, like the one this study created, also offer education professionals the opportunity to "attend to their narrative histories and to all that is at work in the meeting of their and children's diverse lives" (Huber et al., 2013, p. 231). Additionally, there is "substantial evidence suggesting that support from professional colleagues and

supervisors may also serve to decrease the effects of professional burnout" (Newell & MacNeil, 2010, p. 62). In short, the need for professional spaces where teachers can shed cover stories, and be whole persons who work alongside students, parents, and colleagues, has been well established in the literature for some time. Educators and their professional associations need to continuously advocate for not only the creation but also the maintenance of such spaces, lest the spaces be co-opted as accountability measures, or as spaces where the technical or instrumental aspects of teaching are over-prioritized. Bullough (2008) for example, discusses how Professional Learning Community spaces have the potential to offer the kind of *space* teachers need to nurture professional wellness in themselves and others, but in his experience, the discourse around these communities is not "about well-being but … about collaboration to change teachers, to encourage them to embrace 'best practices'—strategies proven to raise student test scores." He asks "how can good results follow when student well-being and teacher well-being are not tightly linked conceptually and bound together institutionally?" (p. 22).

In addition to spaces where teachers can actively process and engage with residue, we can also look for opportunities to reduce the weight of heavy hours, or reduce the need for choices made not to break, and in these ways prevent teachers from encountering morally distressing situations. If for example, Serena had had the time, space, or support to intervene effectively when a social situation arose in the classroom, or if Mara had the time, space, or support to offer the needed individual support to her struggling students, they could have experienced success and professional satisfaction and these experiences would have *continued*, in the place of guilt, to influence practice and identity. Approaches to program design or accountability strategies that seek to add technical tools

or specific tasks to a teachers' day, without making space for them, only constrict the space in which teachers have to be professionals present with students. Other workplace considerations that may help teachers avoid difficult experiences include things like timetabling, class size and class composition considerations, as well as funding for support and specialized staff within each school.

When morally distressing experiences are encountered by teachers, school settings that acknowledge emotional traumas as normal reactions to stressful situations "may significantly contribute to the coping ability of individuals experiencing these conditions" (Newell & MacNeil, 2010, p. 62). Part of this acknowledging might be to offer specialized training to mentors (both those who supervise practicum students, and those involved in mentorship during the induction phase and beyond), schools leaders, or counseling staff so that they might recognize the signs of teacher stress and make an initial, proactive, and compassionate response. Even if an individual teacher is not ready for frank conversation, the acknowledgement that difficult experiences are normal may be an important first step.

It is important to recognize that at the interpersonal level, much can be done to *sustain* educators (Clandinin et al., 2009), and it is at this relational level that I hope this narrative inquiry work will be of most use. Ballet, Kelchtermans, and Loughran (2006) describe how educators must "cope with a turbulent policy environment" (p. 215). This includes constantly changing provincial budgets, governments, and government priorities. Public education will always be caught up in this turbulence, and educators will therefore always be vulnerable (Kelchtermans, 2013). While continual advocacy for funding and policy improvement will always be vital for a publicly funded education system, the

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relational is not to be overlooked as a significant source of change:

> …it is in collaboratively transforming the narratives within which
> people live that narrative inquiry seeks to lay the foundations for social
> change. Without such foundations rooted in the storied experiences of
> ordinary people … efforts at social change are condemned to either be
> ineffective or hollow exercises of externally imposed authority.
> (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 50)

Policies may be created with the best of intentions, but without people to pick them up with the right spirit or understanding, much of those intentions can be lost in their implementation. In both positive and negative ways, "local working conditions buffer, modify, and mediate the policy demands and thus their impact on teachers' actions and job experiences" (Kelchtermans, 2005, p. 1004). In order for individuals to work at improving their local conditions, they must first be awake to the experiences of others.

**Final Thoughts**

My desire to explore the residue of teaching experiences grew through my conversations with Serena, Mara, and Carlos. By attending to this residue more deeply — by looking carefully at those experiences that linger, and by wondering about the qualities and effects of residue — we can better understand some of the work that is at the heart of teaching. An understanding of this work will enable education professionals to begin conversations about teachers' work-lives and what is really required, emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually, to do the work of teaching well. As a profession, there is also much we can learn from and perhaps share with other professionals also

engaged in relational work with moral and emotional dimensions. This inter-professional dialogue might also help to de-stigmatize experiences of residue and reframe them as normal and not insignificant parts of a caring professional's life.

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